APRIL 1st ISSUE, 1930
VOL. LXXIV No. 2

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April 1st

Adventure

Published Twice
A Month

Edgar Franklin Wittmack

The SLAVE RUNNER

A Complete Novel
by
GORDON MACCREAGH

HAROLD TITUS · H. BEDFORD-JONES · HUGH PENDEXTER
LARRY BARRETTO · F. ST. MARS

ADVENTURE

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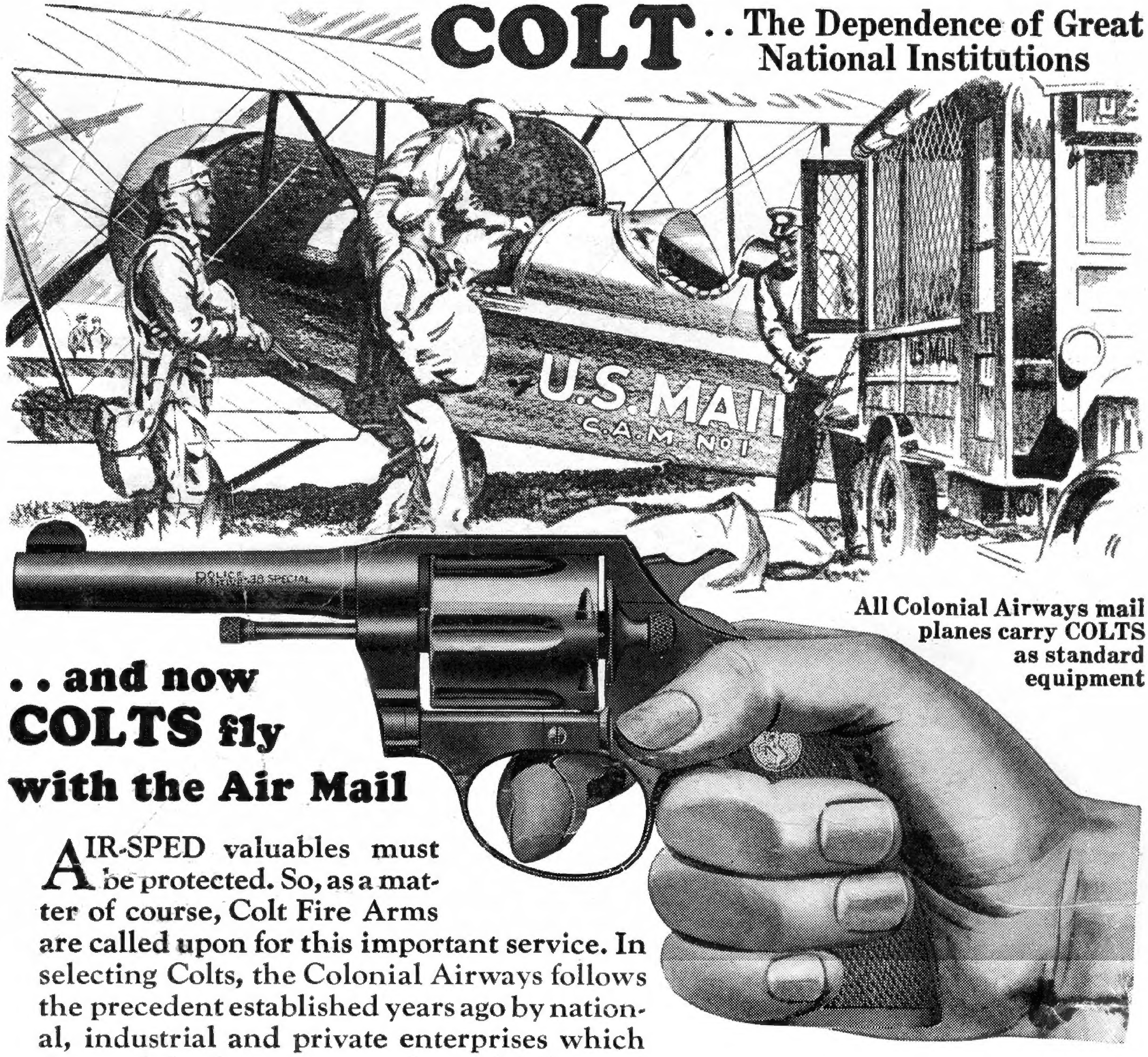

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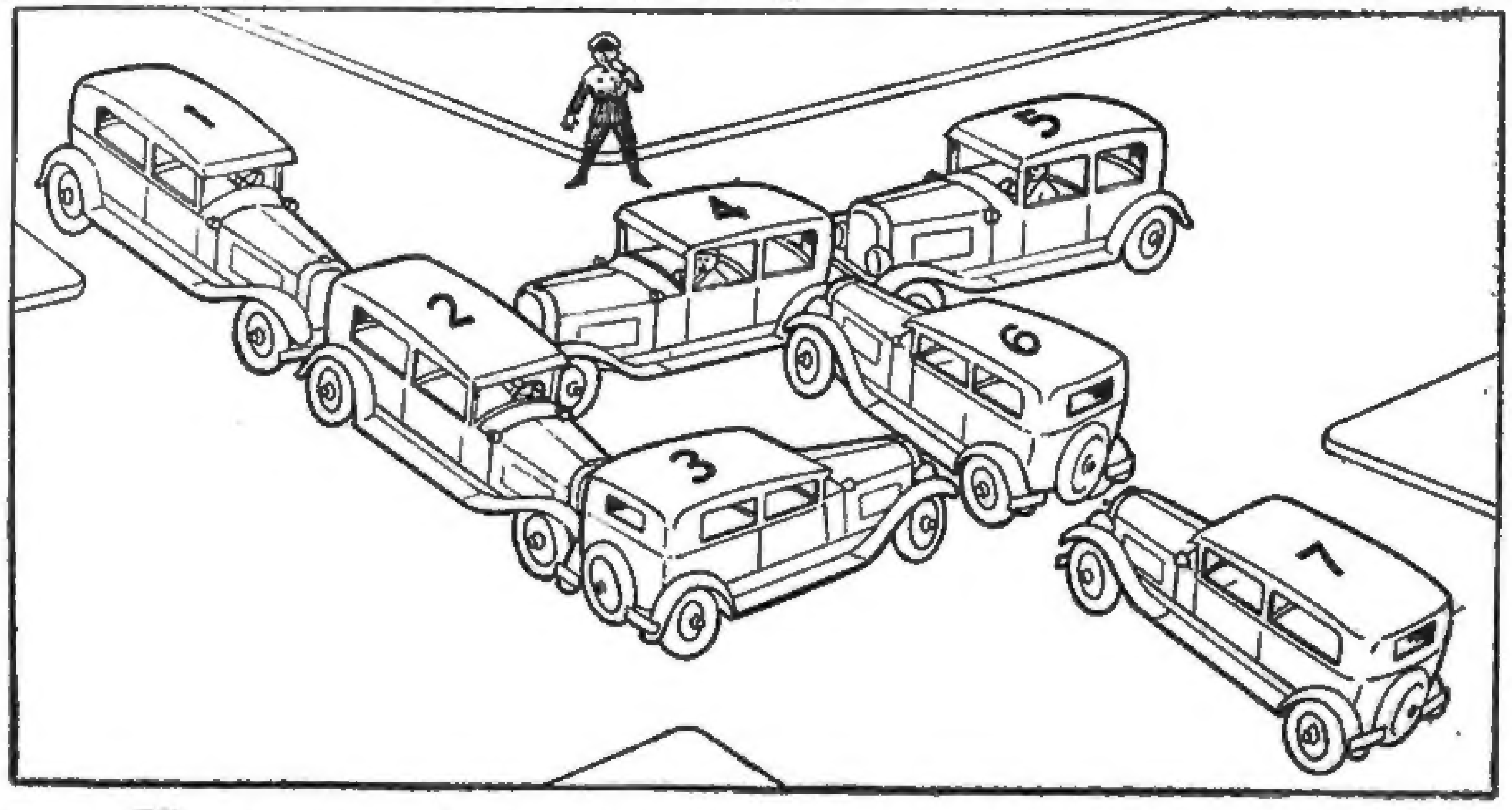
Solve This Traffic Puzzle



In the picture there are 7 cars in a bad traffic jam. None of them can move forward, for each car is blocked by the one in front of it. One of these cars will have to be backed out. Which one? The traffic policeman seems to be stumped. Can you straighten up this tangle for him? Only one car may be moved backward, and if you pick out the right one, you will see that it is not necessary to back up any of the others. Send the number of the car which when backed out will relieve this traffic tie-up, and if your answer is correct you will be qualified for this opportunity.

$500.00 for Promptness We are not only giving the Sedans, radios and so forth in our big prize list amounting to over $6,800.00, but are also giving an additional $500.00 in cash for promptness to the winner of first prize if he or she has been prompt. Thus, the first prize winner will receive the Nash Sedan and $500.00 in cash, or $1,845.00. Find the car which when backed out will relieve this traffic tangle and send the number of it in a letter or on a post card, or you can mark the car on the picture and send it to me. Be sure to write or print your name and address plainly. All who answer correctly can share in the prizes or cash. Duplicate prizes paid in case of ties. ANSWER TODAY. **Free Prize Judge, Dept. 548, 510 N. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.**

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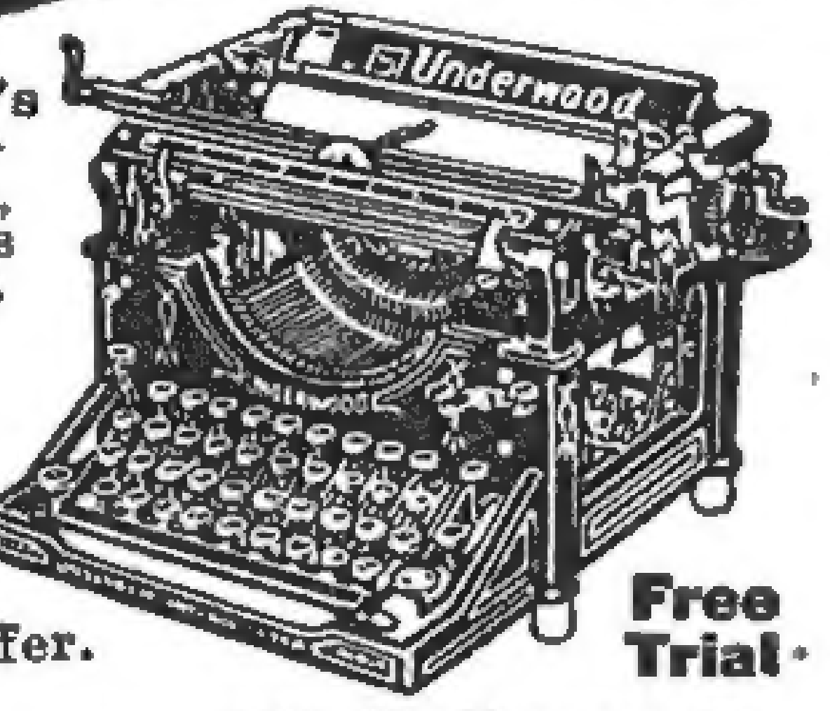

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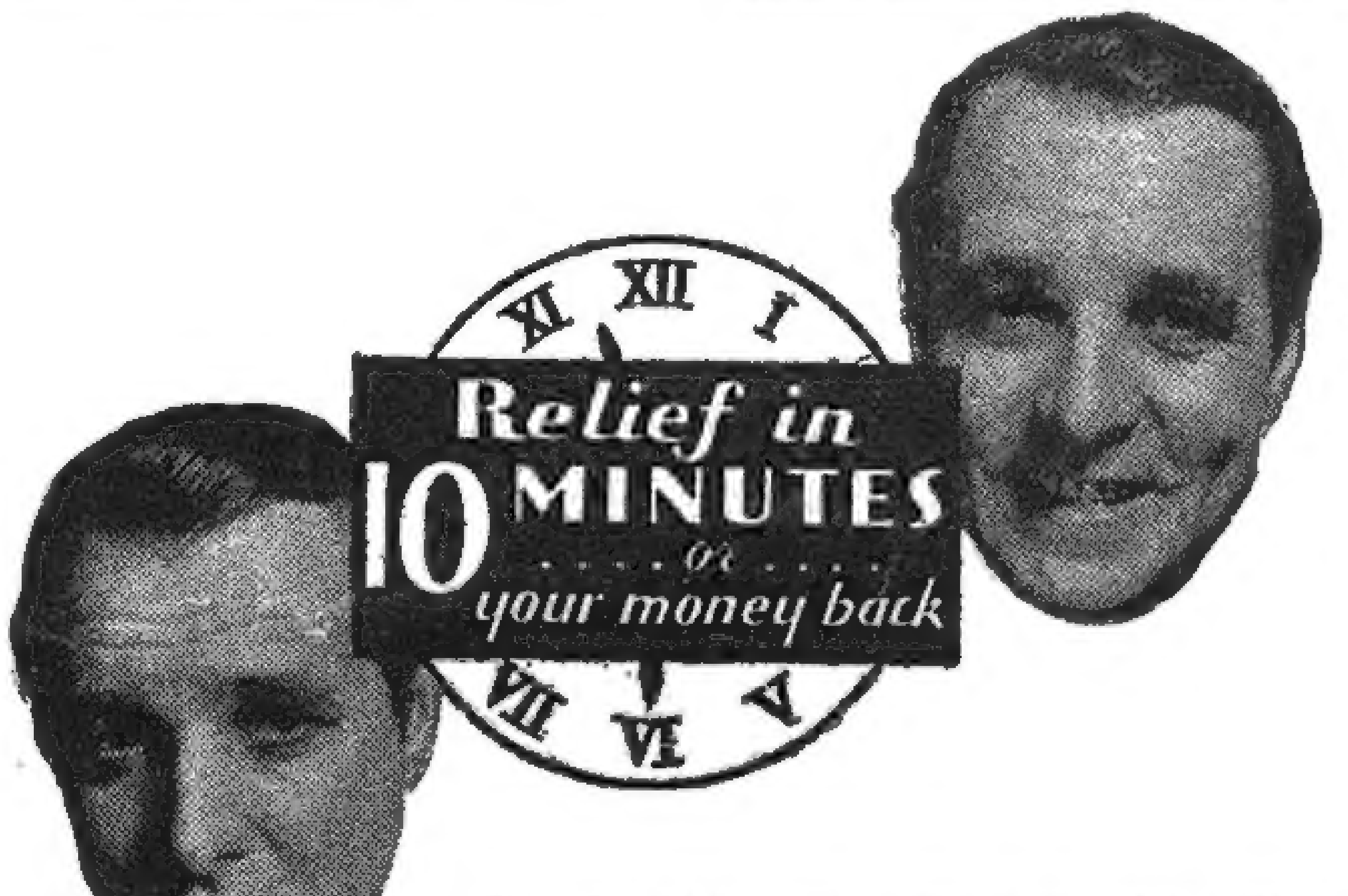

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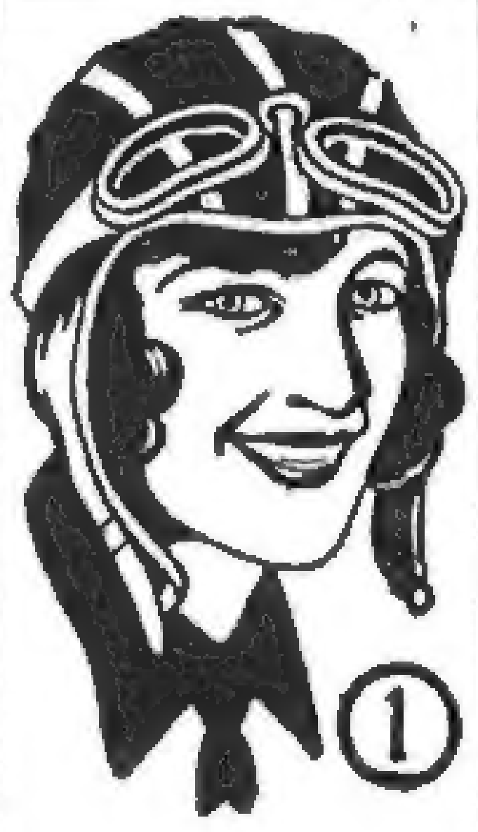
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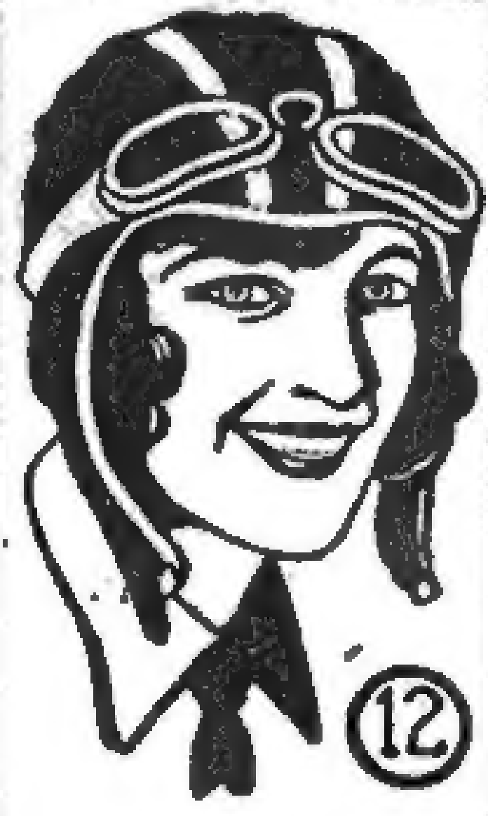
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Prizes from $1800.00 to $4245.00 each have been won through our unique advertising plan. In our last, an old man of 69, out of work, won over $5000.00. A boy, only 15, won $900.00. In next 3 or 4 months thousands of dollars will be awarded to fortunate persons who solve our puzzles and win our prizes.

FIND THE TWIN FLYERS

Watch out! These twelve pictures of a famous woman flyer all look alike—BUT—two, and only two, are exactly alike. **Find these twin flyers!** Some pictures are different in the collar, helmet, goggles, or tie. Remember, only two of the twelve are exactly alike. Find them, and send the numbers of the twin flyers on a post card or letter today. If correct, your answer will qualify you for this opportunity.

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Over 25 prizes, and duplicate prizes in case of ties. It's up to the winner whether he or she chooses $2875.00 in cash or a new Waco airplane, a big automobile, or a new home. A gorgeous prize list! ANYONE WHO ANSWERS THIS PUZZLE CORRECTLY MAY RECEIVE PRIZES OR CASH.

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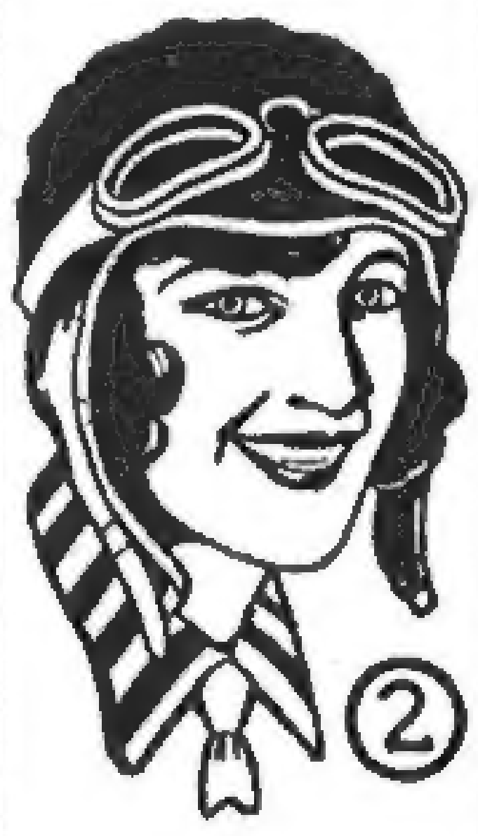
J. D. SNYDER, Dept. 373, 54 W. Illinois St., Chicago, Ill.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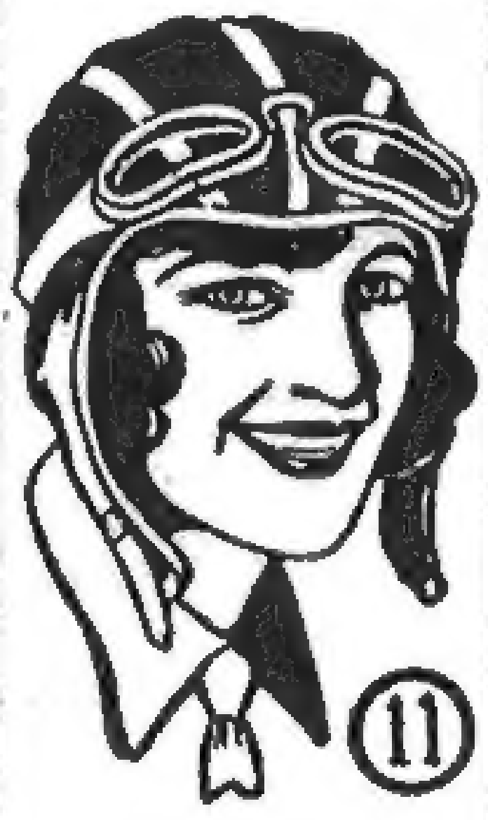
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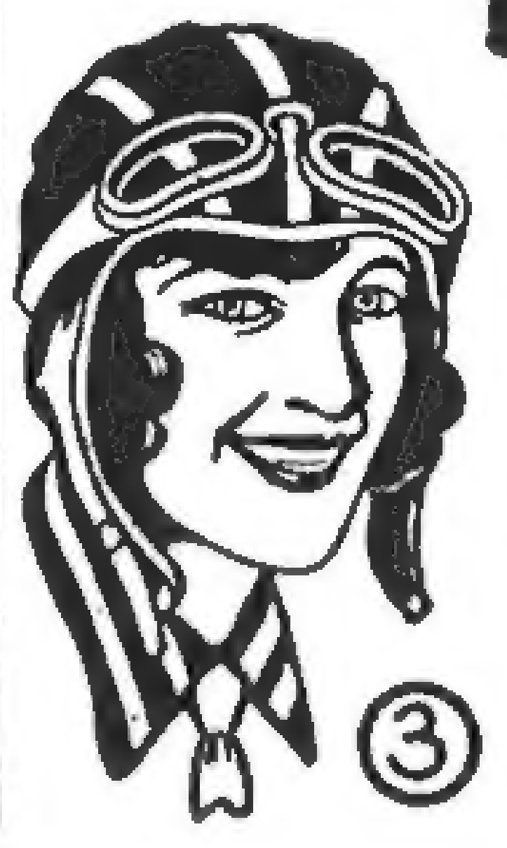
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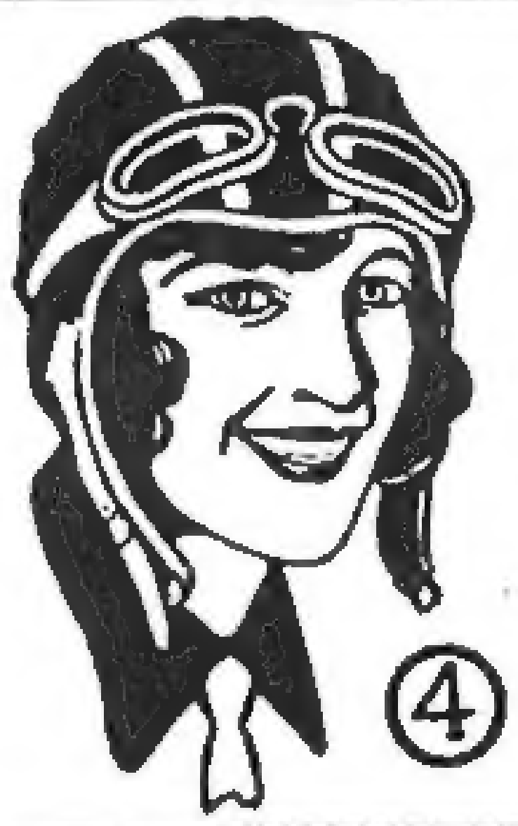
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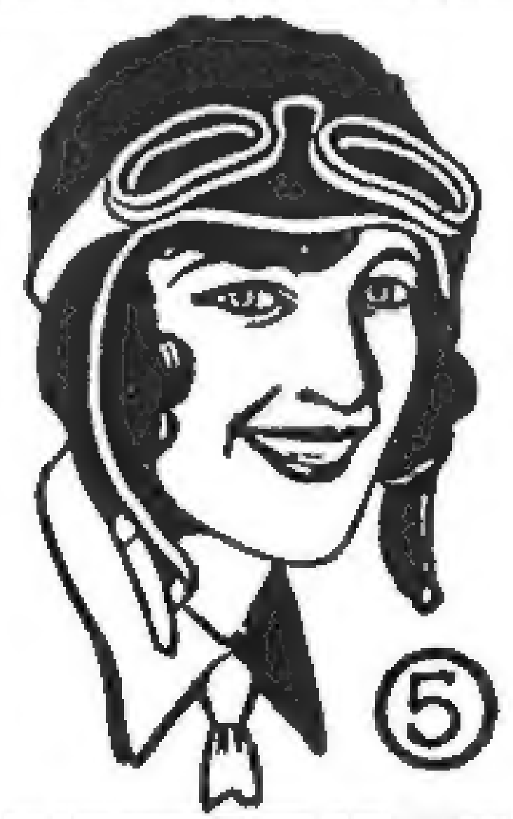
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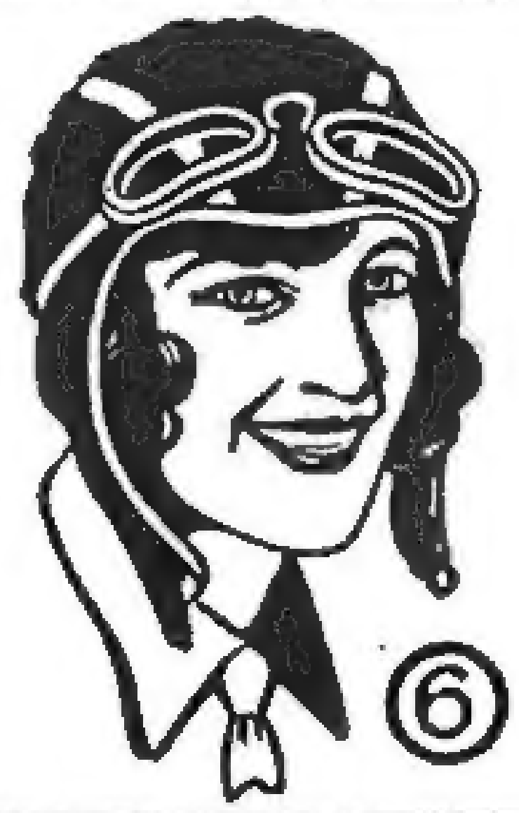
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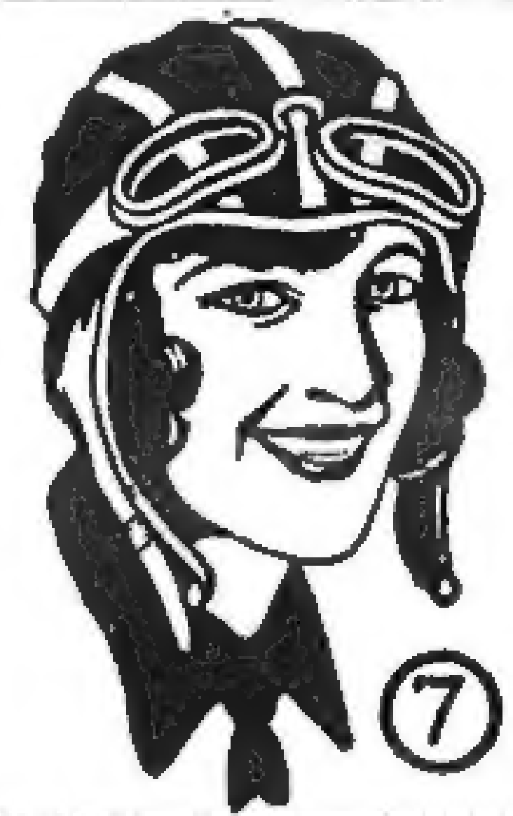
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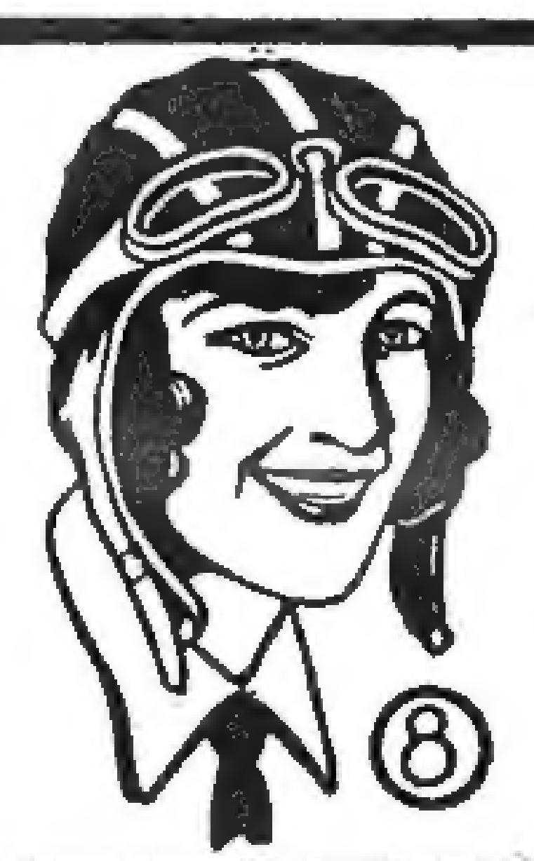
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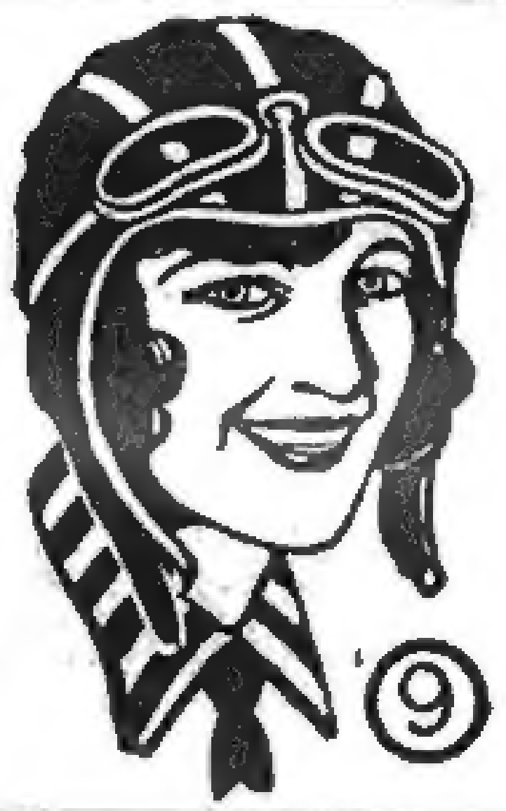
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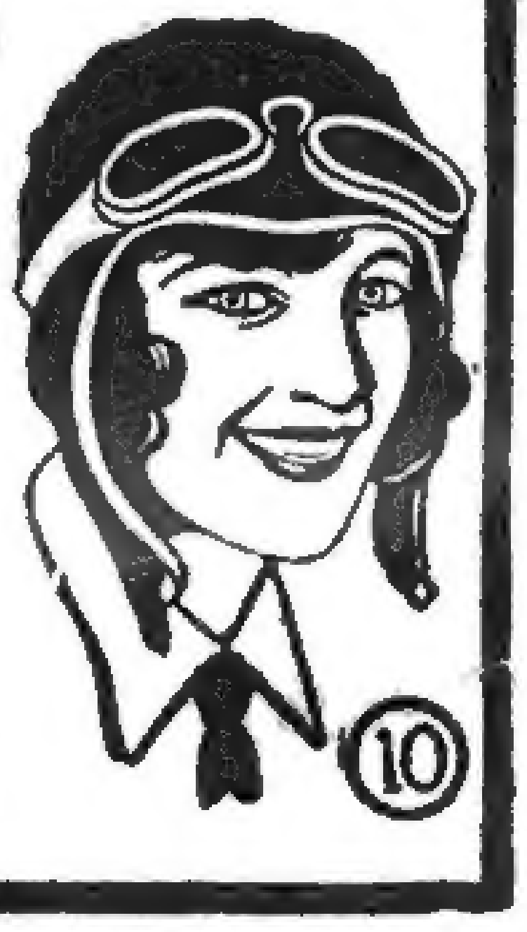
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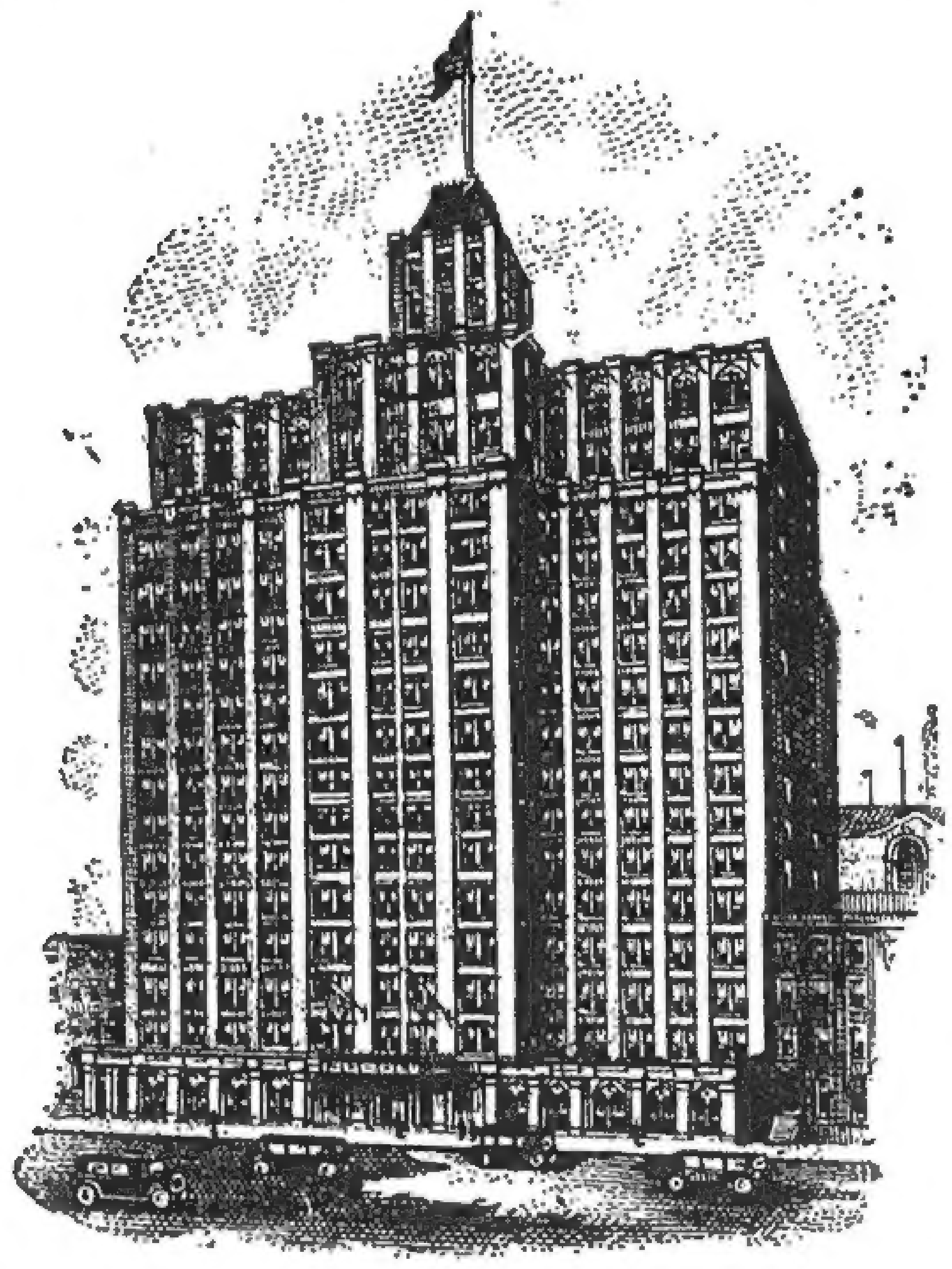

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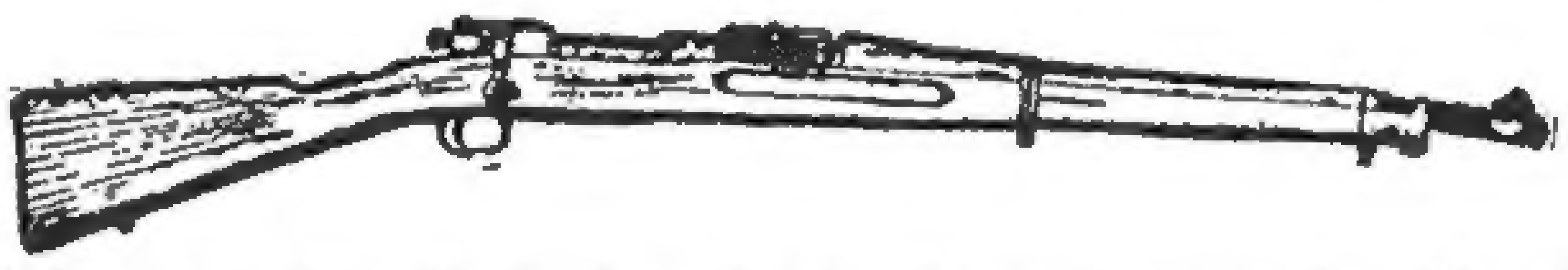

8¾ pounds, 43 inches long, 24-inch barrel, offered assembled and refinished, without bayonet at reduced price, $16.50. Ball cartridges $3.50 per 100, illustrated catalog, 380 pages, Army-Navy equipment, mailed for 50 cents. NEW circular for 2c stamp. Established 1865.

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ADVENTURE—APRIL 15th

ADVENTURE
April 1st, 1930

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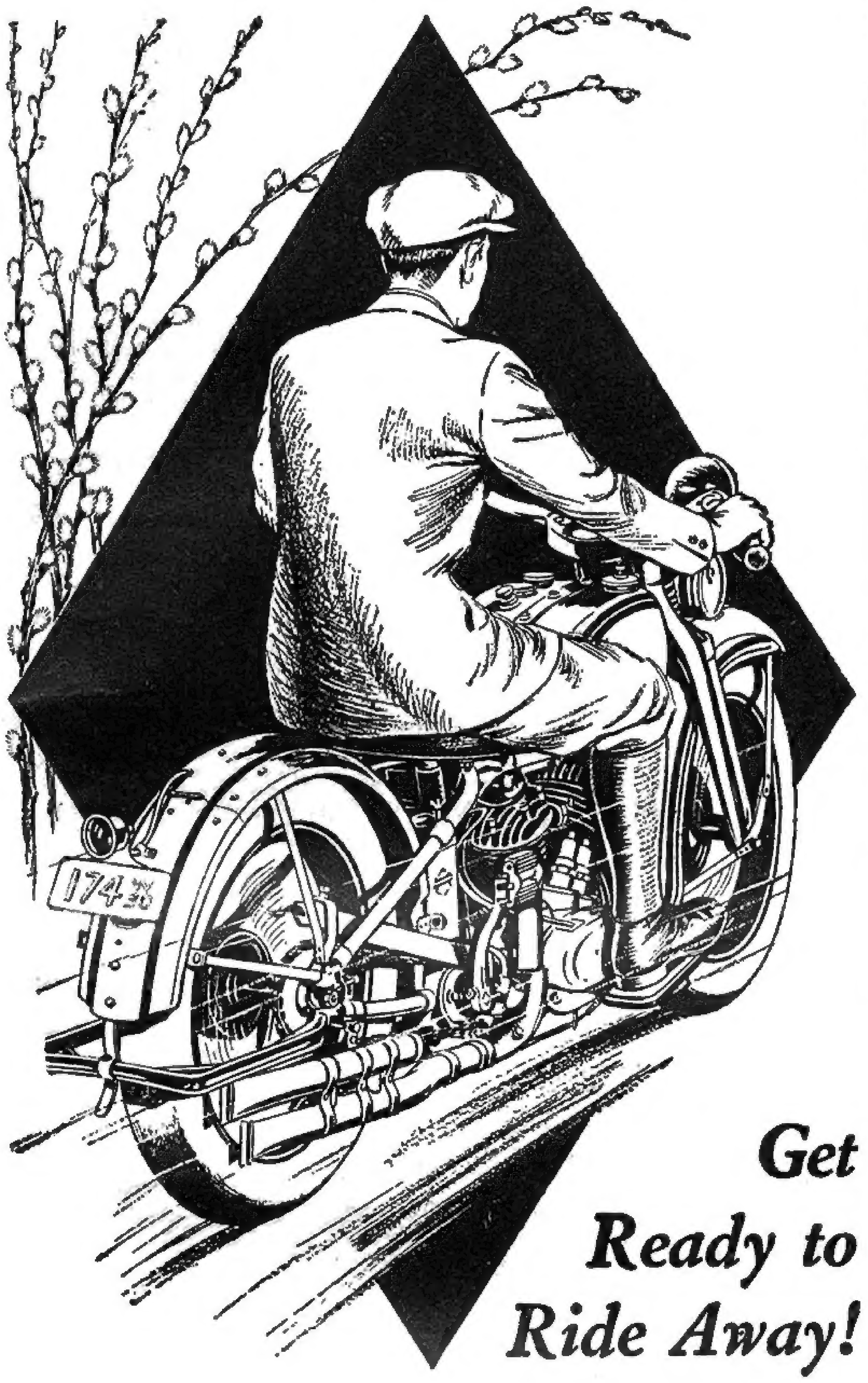
Number 2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Get Ready to Ride Away!

SPRING is just around the corner. Budding branches will soon be waving to you—beckoning you out to the Open Road.

Ride away with the "early birds" this Spring. Get your Harley-Davidson now, so you both will be well acquainted and rarin' to go when the first whiff of Spring comes in from the country.

Drop in on your nearest Harley-Davidson Dealer — look over the 1930 models with their scores of improvements—try out the wonderful "45" Twin shown here — and ask about the Pay-As-You-Ride Plan that makes motorcycle buying so easy.

Mail the Coupon for literature showing full line — the Single, Twins, and Sidecars.

Ride a **HARLEY-DAVIDSON**

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR COMPANY
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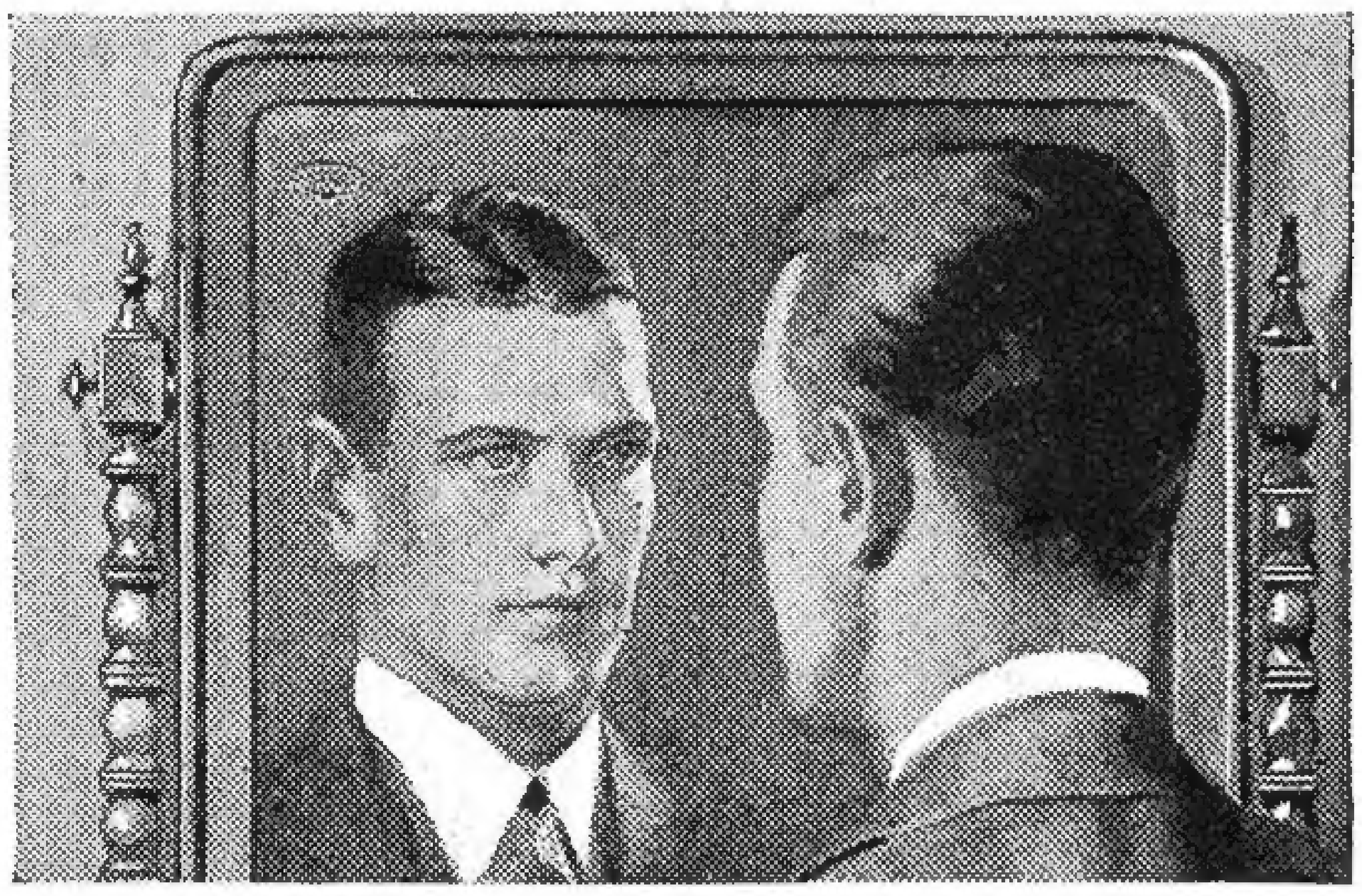
Interested in your motorcycles. Send literature.

Name..

Address..

My age is ☐ 16-19 years, ☐ 20-30 years, ☐ 31 years and up, ☐ Under 16 years. Check your age group.



There's the Man Who's Holding You Down

Yes, sir! There's the man! You see him every time you look in the mirror. His name isn't Brown or Smith or Jones but Y-O-U. He's your real boss. He's the man who decides whether your salary will be $35 a week or $100 or $150.

IF YOU want to get ahead there's just one sure way to do it—train yourself to do the day's work better than any other man in the office. Ability is bound to count. Your employer will be *glad* to pay you more money if you show him you *deserve* it.

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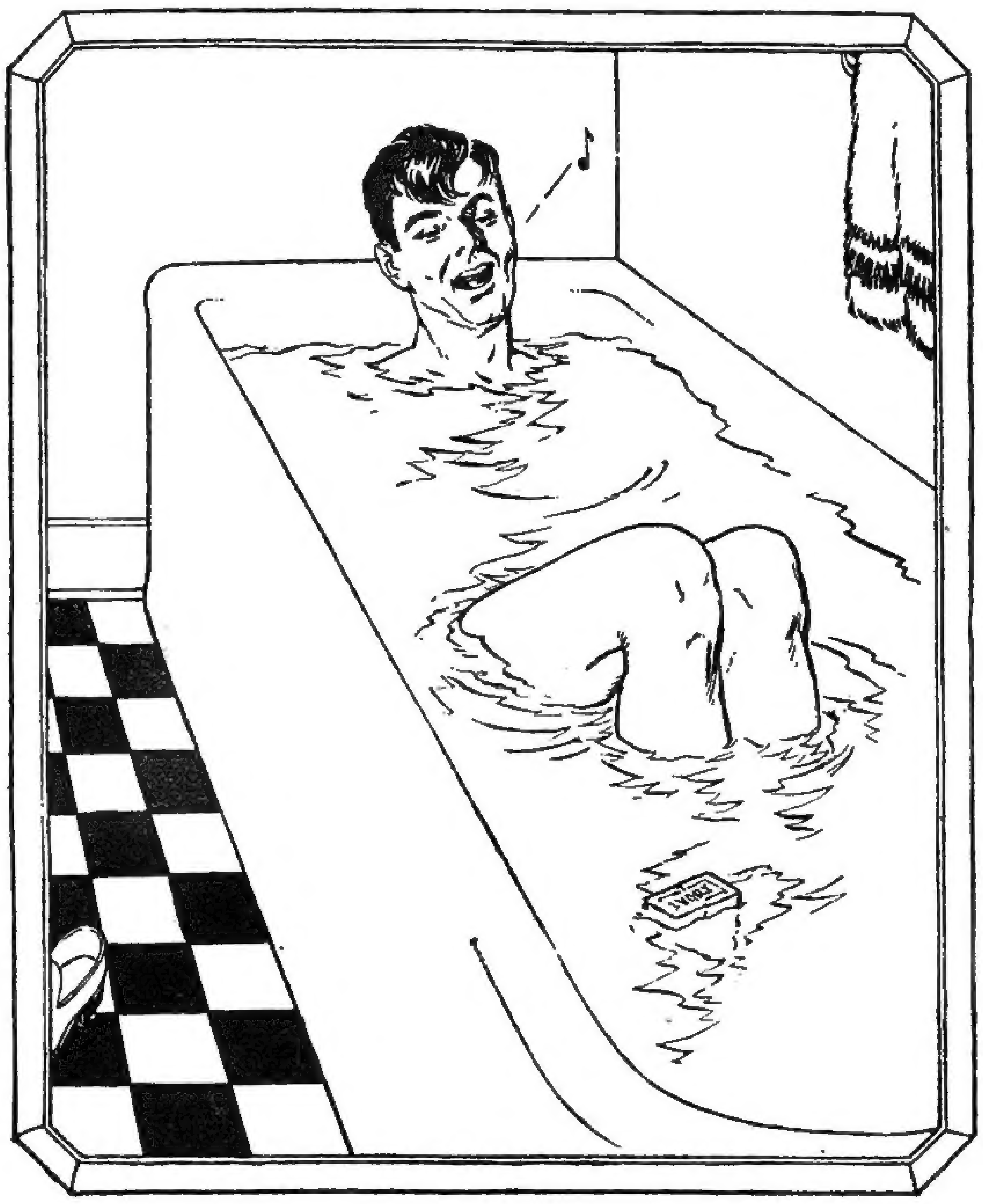

All's well in Room 1407

This chirruping gentleman has forgotten his restless night in a lower berth. While he is planning a persuasive sales argument, his heart goes out in loving kindness to a hotel manager who sits (unconscious of this burst of gratitude) fourteen floors below. . . .

For this traveling guest is rejoicing over a homelike Ivory bath!

Yes, in his tub rides a smaller model of the same white ship that shares his daily bath adventures. "Thank heaven," muses our bather as he slathers his shoulders with epaulets of Ivory foam. What he really means is—"I'm glad I'm not raising my blood pressure trying to scare some timid lather out of a slippery pellet of deep-diving soap!" And so thinking, he tosses his Ivory on the water's lap, for the boyish pleasure of watching it float!

Why do Ivory baths make assistant sales managers feel like millionaires? Because they leave the skin feeling smooth and fresh and luxurious. There is a *priceless* purity in this fine soap!

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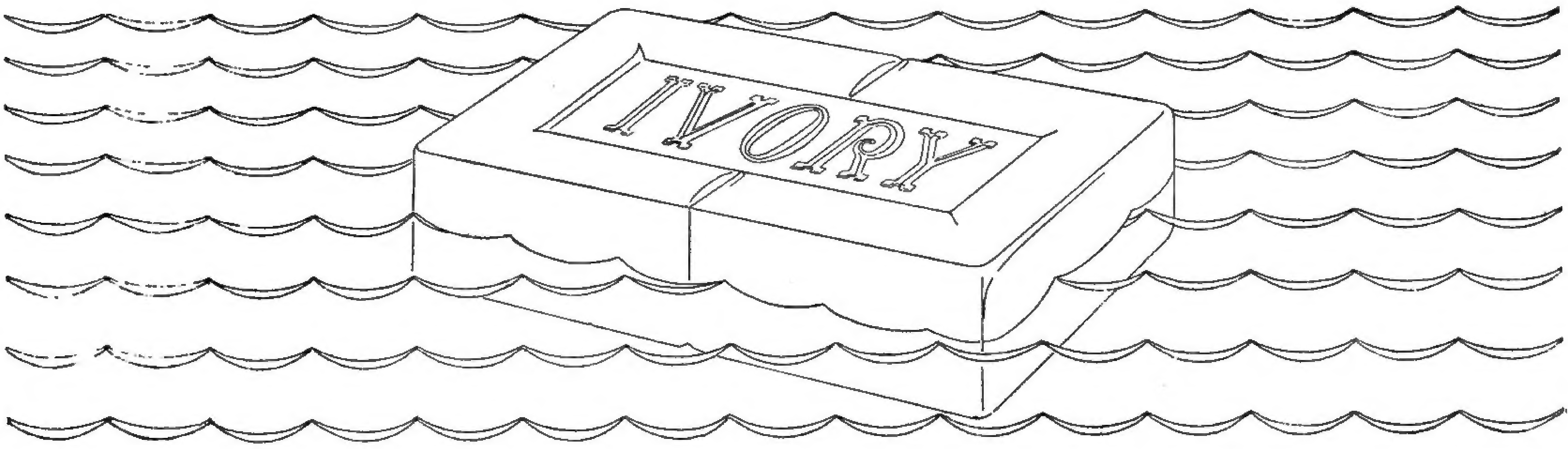

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

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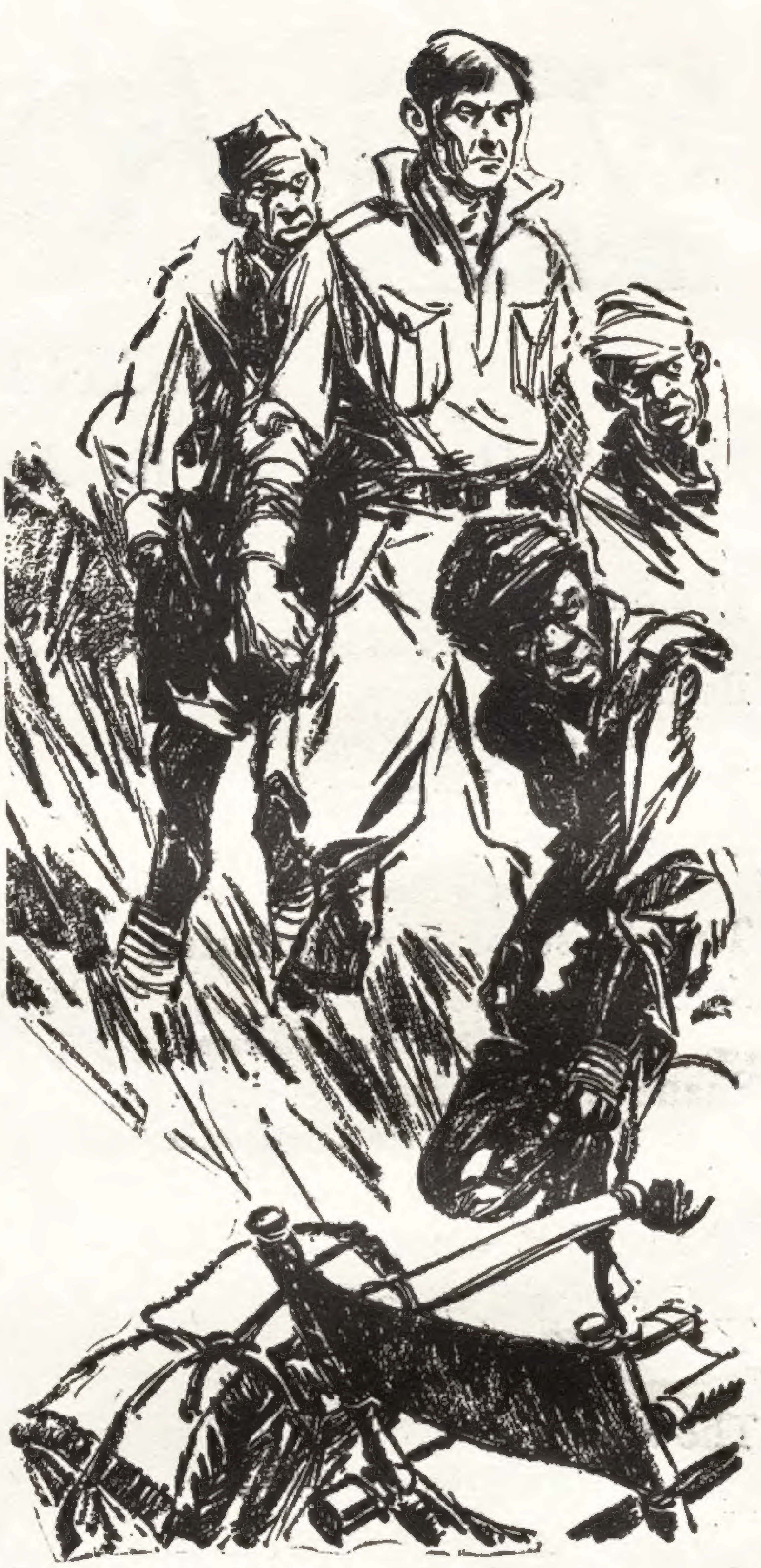
With this exciting novel of the East African Wilds we are glad to welcome back to our pages

GORDON MacCREAGH

who has recently completed his second exploratory expedition in that country



The

"THE NEWS is that Kingi *Bwana* is dead."

The speaker burst into the Williams Hotel in Nairobi and exploded his news like a bomb, and with all the wide spreading and diversified effects of which a bomb is capable.

The Williams is the hangout in Nairobi during the off season of all the *safari* conductors of East Africa. Sunbrowned, heat withered old-timers, whose reminiscences are of the good old days before licenses, when ivory was lucrative spoil of any man who had cold steel nerve and a vast double barreled rifle that fired about ten grains of black powder and a bullet weighing a quarter of a pound.

Younger men in their forties, equally sun scorched and wiry, who helped the old-timers swear at the effete modernism that imposed a license upon each individual *bok* and *beeste* and allowed but a paltry couple or so of each per season. A few youngsters as brown, though not as yet so hard drawn, who envied the older ones their experience and dreamed still the dream that all of them had known of finding, perhaps, by some stroke of improbable fortune, some hidden stretch of new ground where the best heads had not been picked over by past *safaris*.

Men of many ages and many nationalities; but every one of them marked with the indelible stamp that distinguishes all their kind—the narrow eyes with the deep corner puckers that reflect long days of gazing into shimmery distances,

SLAVE RUNNER

dancing yellow *veld* and blue haze under the sun.

And all in the same business. A business which they called—strictly among themselves—lamb herding. Which meant that, since East Africa had become a fashionable picnic ground for wealthy sportsmen from Europe and America, these hard bitten Africanders put their experience to the practical purpose of conducting these tenderfeet out on *safari*, and showing them how to shoot.

Among the gathering in the hotel when the bomb fell were a few officials of the colonial government, whose duties took them into the outlying borders, and who therefore found something in common with these men of the wide *veld*.

The bomb's diversified effect was not apparent till after the first shock

"Kingi *Bwana* dead? How? Where? Who's got the news?"

"Couple of his boys are in. A lion got him, they say, up along the Abyssinian border."

"A lion at last! Good gosh! Well, he always took the most awful chances."

Klein, a small wiry man, who was known throughout East Africa to have killed some hundred and fifty lions or so—he didn't know exactly how many, he had lost count—shook his head and announced in his querulous voice:

"I'll have to see those boys an' get an awful lot more evidence before I can swallow all o' that. Kingi *Bwana* got by a lion? That don't hold water."

"And he didn't take chances, either," another grizzled hunter put in. "You're wrong there, Jacobs. He gave the impression he took chances 'cause he'd smoke a pipe an' hold his fire till his game was right on top of him. But that was 'cause he knew jest 'bout exactly what his beast was goin' to do. Why, Kingi *Bwana* knows how a lion *thinks*."

"And he can shoot, boys, and don't let anybody forget it. Could shoot, perhaps I should say, if this yarn is anyway true. Let's hope it's all just another of those nigger rumors. What are these two boys? Kavirondo? They'll surely have it balled up."

The other side of the bomb's effect came from Sanford, a deputy district commissioner, who seemed to harbor a grievance.

"Well, all I can say is—" he laid down the law thickly— "if this fellow King is dead, it's a very good thing for the border district, and for a lot of other poor devils besides."

Immediate indignation was loudly in evidence; but the loudest voice was Klein's, and Sanford's official standing was no check to the tough little hunter's anger.

"You shut right up, Mr. District Commissioner Sanford. I know what you're driving at, an' I say you've got no proof."

Sanford flushed. He was a big man and powerful, though running a little bit to flesh. His heavy eyebrows meeting above a strong nose denoted temper and wilfulness; and the dignity of his position sat heavily upon him. He might have resented Klein's peremptoriness more definitely; but he had been looking upon more whisky pegs than he could very well carry. So he contented himself with words.

"I know I have no proof. He's always been too bally sly. If I had had evidence on the half of my convictions he'd have been doing his time on the Breakwater two years ago. But nothing will ever persuade me that he's anything but a damned Yankee slave runner; and if he weren't dead, as I sincerely trust for the sake of his wretched cargoes, he is, I'd catch him red handed at it sooner or later."

A laugh came from the corner.

"You're a damned liar, Sanford," drawled the voice behind the laugh. "And if you weren't, you'd never catch Kingi *Bwana* at anything."

"Who says I'm a liar?"

The commissioner pushed himself not oversteadily to his feet, while the veins in his temples swelled purple against the flushed red of his face—with the effort, as much as with his Jove-like anger—and he made as though to plunge at the insulting corner.

"We all do!" came an immediate chorus of a dozen voices.

The black eyebrows scowled their rage about the room. But hesitantly. Where, in the face of such universal opposition, could one begin?

"Well, I can't thrash twenty of you," the outnumbered man muttered, and slowly sank to his seat again.

The drawling voice from the corner took up the tale again.

"There's an example of the official mind. Somebody runs slaves along the Abyssinian border. He's too smart to be caught. King is the only white man operating around there. King's a smart man; moreover, he goes his own way and gets things done without either official help or permission, which is blasphemy and *lèse-majesté.* Therefore King's the culprit."

There was a general laugh. The lazy voice had neatly hit off just about what most of these free men of the *veld* thought about most of those whose duty it was to impose official restrictions upon them. Sanford, fuzzy headed as he was, saw that sentiment was overwhelmingly against him. He heaved himself up and strode with heavy, unsteady dignity from the room, leaving only the Parthian shot:

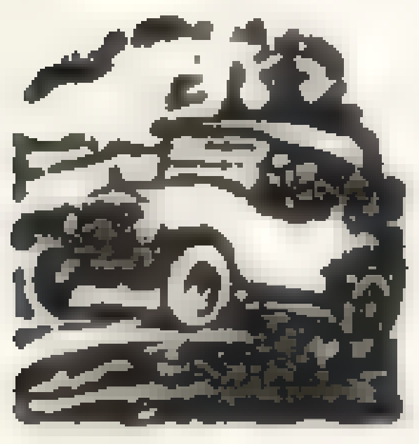
"Some of you smart gentlemen will perhaps remember our little conversation when next you come before me for overshooting your licenses. Come along, Peterson; let's get out of this den of know-it-alls."

A youngster whose fresh English complexion denoted his newness to the country got up and followed him, and a voice followed them both—

"You'll have to have evidence of half your convictions, old man; don't forget that."

Various murmurs of approbation, of belated indignation, and calls for pegs swelled in the room. Above them Klein's nervous voice—

"And now I've got to get hold o' those two Kavirondo boys and see how much truth I can beat out of them about poor old Kingi *Bwana.*



DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANFORD and young Peterson were *en route* across the trackless *veld.* As a matter of fact, Sanford had come down to Nairobi to meet Peterson and to take him up and install him in his job, which was the rather ghastly one of British consul at Moyale, on the Abyssinian border, where the caravan trail came through to Kenya Colony. Peterson's predecessor had died of dysentery with the appalling suddenness of Africa, and Sanford, between gasps for breath and grunts as the Ford car bounded from hollow to grass clump where the road was no more than a general direction, was laying down the law of conduct.

"There are just two rules, young man; and they are absolute, without exception. Never step outside of your door without your solar topee on your head. That one is easy. The other one sounds easy, but it isn't. Always boil everything you drink. It isn't easy because you've got to see to it yourself. Leave it to your house boys just once, and they'll dip you up the nearest filth to save themselves trouble and will all swear themselves blind dumb that it boiled for half an hour.

"That's what happened to young Smith. He got careless. You watch those two rules and you'll pull through all right. Your job won't trouble you much. It's a loaf up there, really. All you've got to do is to hold up the caravans, which are few nowadays, and collect customs on them. Not more than a day's work in the week; and you'll get some of the best shooting that's left in Africa."

Peterson was immediately interested. Sport, of course, appealed to him much more than work. He fell to asking innumerable questions about hunting and about the beasts he might meet and about their ways. And Sanford supplied him with the usual miscellany of fact and misinformation with which colonial officials are so copiously supplied.

Sanford was doing all of his necessary talking now, in spite of the discomfort of the jolting car, because presently they would come to where deep gullies intersected the plain and the car would have to be abandoned for *safari. Safari* meant foot slogging over Africa; for the *tsetse* fly pest killed off all horses, and even mules, in three days. And on *safari* the bulky assistant commissioner needed all his breath for the deadly business of putting one foot before the other.

There was one important matter to be settled before that trial arrived. More important even than sport. Peterson introduced it.

"What about this slave business?"

Sanford's thick brows came together in immediate anger and weariness. The slave business was the particular cross that he had to bear, and he swore at the very mention of it.

"That's my blasted *shauri*. You don't have to worry much about that; except, of course, to help me with any information that you may get hold of. Though, at that, it'll trouble you enough. But your job is simple. It is British law that as soon as a slave sets foot on British territory he is a free man. You'll be having slaves skip across the border to escape from bestial treatment; and then a host of Abyssinian officials will come yelping to bluff you into giving them back what they call their property. They're the most insolent people on earth—nigger men boss in their own country. They think they're as good, or better, than a white man, and they'll shout and stamp and scream in front of you with no more respect than if you were a *shenzi;* and they'll try to bulldoze you into giving up their runaways. Your job is to tell them all to get to hell out of British territory unless they have passports—which they never have—and give up nothing; not even a dog or a stray cow."

Sanford was voicing no more than the universal opinion of every border official in Kenya Colony; and, while there was a good deal of truth in what he said, his statement was not free from official inaccuracy. He went on to furnish further misstatement according to the best of his light.

"My end of it will hardly affect you as far west as Moyale. The game farther east is to raid the runaway slaves and run them out of the country for sale elsewhere."

So startling a statement sounded like the horrors of fifty years ago. Slaves were bad enough; but traffic, organized business, in slaves, was incredible. Where could one buy or sell slaves in this modern day of grace? Peterson required enlightenment. Sanford supplied it with weary disgust; and this time his information was true.

"This is how it happens. Slaves escape across the border all the time. There exists one or two gangs of raiders, Arabs mostly, who round them up; either bluff them, lie to them, pretend they are British officials sent to protect them—the slaves are animal fools anyhow—or they just recapture them by plain force. Then they jockey them along the border line. If we get after them, they skip into Abyssinia. If some Abyssinian chief thinks he'd like to grab up a good collection of slaves for himself, they slip over to our side. So they jockey them along eastward and finally run them across the corner of Italian Somaliland to the coast from where they ship them in native *dhows* to southern Arabia. And if anybody tells you you can't sell slaves in Hadramaut today, you can just have a good laugh at him. The Sultan of Es Shehr will snap them up as fast as you can deliver them, and the Sultan of Cḫishin will outbid him."

Young Peterson gasped at the recital.

"But, good Lord, that's frightful, don't you know! That sort of thing ought to be jolly well stopped."

Sanford grunted with grim disgust.

"That's my *shauri* to stop it. If the damned Abyssinian officials would cooperate we could do something. But they're useless. We have treaties with their central government about mutual help; but these border gorillas are too far away to care. Each little monkey chief is a law unto himself, and our complaints get nowhere."

"But—but hang it all then, sir, can't the Italians stop them going through their end of Somaliland?"

Sanford barked a harsh laugh.

"Pah! The Italians! *Imprimis*, they don't care. *Secundo*, it would cost a lot of money and men to keep up a constant patrol of their desert. And finally, if a patrol did attempt to interfere with a slave runner, it would get a good licking and the cargo would go through anyhow. We know perfectly well where they get through. Just north of Illigh there's a maze of little rivers and creeks called Baia del Negro, where, as its very name implies, they've shipped slaves through for hundreds of years. If we had that territory we'd stop the business in a week. But those damned dagos either don't care, or they're afraid to tackle the slave gangs, who are a pretty hard and cunning and desperate crew, let me assure you; and I know because I've dealt with them for two years."

Sanford was that type of stanch Englishman to whom every foreigner was a person inherently inferior by the automatic reason of his alien birth. Such a person might, if he conformed with religious strictness to the conventions of the Sanfords and their ilk, be accepted upon terms of gracious familiarity. But if he did not so conform, he was to be anathema, utterly without the pale, and was to be mentioned only with a properly qualifying epithet. Sanford's favorite epithet which adequately, to his mind, expressed the noxious foreigner, was "damned."

"That's pretty dashed thick," was all that Peterson could say.

Sanford continued with gusto. It was seldom that he got a chance to air his pet grievance.

"The worst of them and the best organized is a scoundrelly Arab-Italian halfbreed called Matteo bin Ibrahim. He is—he was—in partnership with this damned Yankee, this King fellow, and they were as cunning as they were conscienceless. But I'll trip him up now, by Jove; King was the brains of the combination."

"Was, you say, sir? Is that true about the lion then? And he seemed to have a lot of defenders of his character."

The stanch defense of the hunters in the Williams Hotel had evidently had its effect upon young Peterson. But the older man grunted forth his creed; and it was, without doubt, based upon his personal experience; though just whose was the fault for such experience it would not be quite easy to say. Pompous officialdom clashing with independent spirits might have explained much. However, Deputy Commissioner Sanford's opinion was his opinion; and, as such, he was ineradicably convinced it was right; and he voiced it accordingly.

"Hm! Those fellows will always side with anybody against a government official; and you may as well remember that in your future dealings with them. And the lion story is true, thank heaven. I had those boys brought before me and questioned them. It's a providential deliverance for the whole district; and I feel that now I shall be able to break up this horrible traffic."

All of which, as the drawling voice of the Williams Hotel would have said, was typical vaporings of the official mind; and of all officials, typically Sanfordian.

YOUNG Peterson was out for sport. Intently and eagerly out. For two reasons. One was that a native had come in and reported a pair of roan antelope in the neighborhood, and had sworn that he could lead the consul *bwana* directly to them.

Roan antelope was a prize extraordinary; one for which many rich sportsmen would make a *safari* especially to get. One of the curious habits of this splendid beast is that it appears in a district suddenly from nowhere, and then disappears as suddenly without trace into nowhere. So no time was to be lost.

Another reason was that Peterson's servant had announced enigmatically—

"One *bwana* coming from Abesha side."

"Huh! A white man from Abyssinia?" This was unusual.

Native caravans came through; but white men at this farthest extremity of Abyssinia were as few and far between as roan antelope.

"From where do you know this news, M'boko?"

"One *shenzi* tells. One *bwana m'kubwa* comes; he got plenty men, plenty tent, plenty gun; he got even horse. One *bwana Amlikani*. Two days' time he get here."

Peterson had already given up trying to find out how the natives got their news. He had spent fruitless hours in questioning, just as had hundreds of other white men, who had also given up and accepted the thing as a mystery which they named "bush telegraph," the surpassing mystery of which was its so often astounding accuracy.

An *Amlikani*—an American—Peterson could believe. Any crazy thing was to be expected from them. One had come through last year. Peterson had heard a great deal about that one. An enormous fellow, traveling for some museum or other; loud mouthed and braggart, who tried to convey the impression that he alone, on account of his size and vast experience in organization and expedition equipment, could make such a trip. The hunters in Nairobi still laughed over his pretensions. The more so since an indigent family of Czecho-Slovakians, including a woman and a child, had made the same trek from Abyssinia to Nairobi with nothing more than they carried on their own backs. Yes, anything was to be expected of Americans. But a horse—and in that *tsetse* infested country? The old futile question shot from Peterson's lips—

"How do you know?"

The servant retired behind his mask of African obtuseness.

"One *shenzi* tells. Two days' time he gets here. You wait see."

Peterson had heard too many stories about bush telegraph to disregard this information in its entirety. Another American might well be collecting for another museum. Museums in America were insatiable, he knew, and were positively choked with money for expeditions into Africa. Roan antelope would be an achievement for such a museum to hurrah about. So Peterson silently consigned all bally Americans to perdition—he was young enough to follow in Sanford's school of scorn for foreigners—and he girded himself swiftly to go out and get those roan antelope for himself.

Of course, they were not where the little Kavirondo had said they were. That is one of the peculiarities of roan. A long day was spent in vain tramping over a burning *veld*, trudging up to the tops of the low rolling hills and blinking at the far heat haze through the field glasses, wondering fretfully whether the game might not be lying down in the long grass just round the shoulder of the next hump of ground.

Impalla were to be picked out here and there in the open plain, of course. *Impalla* are always to be seen sporting and leaping in the middle of no shelter, relying, apparently, upon their knowledge of their phenomenal speed to save themselves from prowling enemies.

A few stray *kongoni*, too, in the shade of distant flat topped acacias; and in the far distance, what might be zebra.

BUT Peterson was not after any such common stuff. Those he could go out and get any day. He wanted roan antelope and nothing but roan; and he knew that an ill advised shot at something else might startle the very beasts he wanted out of the nearest clump of tall grass; and then they would run for miles. So Peterson tramped over the *veld* for the whole of a scorching day and got nothing.

But hope springs eternal in the hunter's breast, perhaps more so than in that of any other human. The next day Peterson was out betimes again, and in a sweat of excitement, for the little Kavirondo pointed at shapeless blurs in patches of sand and said that they were the tracks of the coveted roan. His M'boko, unaccustomed to the job of gun bearer, added to his master's fever by pointing in the general direction of north and announcing stolidly—

"*Amlikani bwana safari* come that side."

Peterson was too busy to ask the useless question of how he knew. The little Kavirondo was giving vent to ape-like cluckings and smacking of the lips. He was spreading his squat nostrils to the warm wind and rolling his eyes. All of which denoted a simian excitement at the nearness of game.

Many white men have wondered how some native hunters can detect the nearness of game where nothing is in sight. The little monkey Kavirondos scratch themselves vaguely when questioned and say they can feel it in their skin; and they often add—

"The same way a lion feels it."

Many white hunters with plenty of experience behind them maintain that the whole performance is hokum designed to impress the foolish *bwana* in the hope of getting a bigger *backsheesh* out of him; that one will come upon game sooner or later anyhow. Many other white hunters, with longer years of experience, just look away into the distance and say they don't know; it's damn' queer.

At all events Peterson's Kavirondo led him off in a new direction and began to scramble through a country dotted with low mimosa scrub and outflung clumps of rocks, and intersected by narrow, deep little gullies. Good lion country, had Peterson experience enough to know it.

After some two hours of this frightfully tiresome going the Kavirondo suddenly flattened himself into the grass at the crest of a rise and beckoned with nervous fingers behind him. M'boko quickly pulled his master down to his knees and made him understand that caution was necessary.

The Kavirondo was pointing a skinny, copper bangled arm across the empty nowhere. Peterson, of course, could see nothing. But following the pointed direction through his field glasses, he presently discerned, marvelously blended with the heat shimmering yellow grass, a pair of magnificent reddish brown beasts with long curving horns. They were too far away to distinguish, even through the glasses, the black and white face markings which would identify them as roan antelope; but he "felt it in his skin" that the little hunter's excitement was not over any lesser game; and the excitement immediately transferred itself to him. Accordingly he acted with less judgment than even his inexperience excused.

It was a long stalk. Not altogether difficult, on account of the excellent cover afforded by the gullies and mimosa brush; yet formidable enough for a novice. Young Peterson felt that he would have difficulty enough in hiding himself alone, without the added encumbrance of two tagging along behind. He ordered them, therefore, to stay where they were, and he set off with infinite, and as yet unnecessary, caution alone.

Had his boy, M'boko, been a trained gun bearer, he would have remonstrated. A gun bearer knows that he has but one duty on earth; and that is to stick closer than glue to his master's heels. To advance when he advances; to stop when he stops; to lie prone when he lies prone; and to run away when—and only when—his master runs. There are gun bearers, few and rare, who have been known to observe that last rule. Their usual procedure is to be well and safely up a tree when the second gun is required at the urgency of life and death.

A gun bearer, moreover, would have told young Peterson that it was the sign of a very foolish novice to go off alone, with all faculties intent upon stalking game, in a lion country. But M'boko was a house boy. What did he know about such things?

As for the Kavirondo, he immediately curled himself up in the grass like a dog to snatch some moments of instant sleep. What business was it of his to question the will of white *bwanas* who went hunting? They were strange, inexplicable people, were *bwanas*, who would talk meaningless words which they thought to exist in the Swahili language, and who would thereupon fly into exasperated rages and would beat natives for no reason. The white men were the lords of the earth. It was always better to let them do exactly as they pleased. So the Kavirondo curled up in the grass and chattered contentedly at M'boko.

PETERSON crawled off alone. He had traversed with infinite caution an open stretch and had climbed in and out of the welcome shelter of a gully; he had made a hundred yards, when he heard an insistent chattering behind him coming from where he had left the servants. In an immediate frenzy at the brute idiocy of natives, he turned to curse the fools, although they crouched yards, hundreds of yards, too far away for the beasts to hear. And at the same instant a sudden tightening of the breath caught at his chest as the belated thought came that the men were trying to attract his attention to some danger. But it was not the kind of danger that he had, for a moment, half feared. Both men were pointing excitedly beyond him and away to his half left. He looked, and his heart fell to the very soles of his *veld* boots.

Coming over the distant ridge was a long line of black figures with bundles on their heads.

Peterson diverted his curse to the crawling line. The thing was true then. This must be the *safari* of this pestilential American. Why in hell must the thing come just in this direction out of all Africa? And exactly at this moment, too? Why couldn't it come tomorrow, or yesterday, or just half an hour later? And why must it be just this bally American who would be keen, with all the energy of his race, to get roan antelope above all other things?

Thus did Peterson curse the unwelcome interlopers and his own luck, too. Then he began to see that the *safari* would pass to his left anyhow, in the direction of Moyale; and with a muttered "Thank God for that," he set himself once more to his long stalk.

But it was his fate that day that annoyances should interfere with his sport. He had made another three or four hundred cautious yards, when a distant shouting began to impinge upon his consciousness. In a blaze of impotent fury he turned his head to see a khaki shirted figure, still some four hundred yards away, racing toward him, mounted upon a miraculous horse, waving his arms like a maniac and shouting as though there were no game within a hundred miles. Something or other, clearly, the fellow was trying to bring to his urgent attention.

Peterson cursed him in silent rage for a fool as well as a poor sportsman. Some idiot idea the man must have to deter him from his game till he could come up and get in on the stalk. Well, he'd be eternally damned if he'd allow that. With gritted teeth he set himself to cover just a few more yards of bush to where he could get a clear, though long shot, before the other should arrive on the scene.

Then the maniac began shooting. Peterson through a red haze of fury saw that the lunatic was using a pistol—and at four hundred yards.

"Rotten, blasted Yankee sportsmanship!" raged Peterson.

And murderous thoughts of turning his rifle upon the maniac coursed through his mind as he saw his precious roan antelope throw up their heads, jump high once as a spent bullet patted somewhere near them, and then race off, skimming the grass like brown thistledown. In desperation he essayed a futile shot; missed, of course, and turned in black fury to shake his fist at the careering madman.

The idiot was screaming at him and pointing at something. Somewhere back of Peterson. He was near enough now for snatches of words to arrive on the wind.

"Look out!" they sounded like. And, "In the long grass!"

Once more Peterson's heart skipped a beat. The urgency of the maniac's actions seemed to imply—was it possible that something— The dormant sense of danger that stays with every man in the lone African bush leaped to startled life. Peterson concentrated on the long yellow grass forty yards behind him as much as his thumping pulse would let him. It seemed to him almost that it moved. But it was impossible that anything should be there. He had crawled through that very patch just a few seconds ago.

The thundering of hoofs was in his ears; and above them the urgent voice again:

"Look out! He's going to charge! Hold your ground and take it easy!"

Then Peterson was sure of movement in the grass. Something that swished from side to side. Something like a yellow rope frayed out to a tuft, or tassel, at the end. And then just in front of the swishing thing a face took form in the yellow grass. A yellow face, huge and menacing; yellow eyes fixed with frightful intent upon his own, and with a great fringe of yellow hair that trailed raggedly off and blended with the grass.

THAT was when Peterson should have shot. That was his perfect chance. But he stood and did nothing. He was not exactly afraid. His mind registered the perfectly clear fact that he was face to face with a lion for the first time in his life; which would be quite as clearly the last time if he did not immediately shoot, and that, with cool accuracy. Yet his limbs refused to respond to his mental impulses. He did nothing. He just stood.

The phenomenon is common enough. Every Maine guide knows it as buck fever. They have all seen novices, brought face to face with a harmless deer, just paralyzed into inaction by their own excitement.

And just so did Peterson stand, motionless.

He was aware of a great gray horse, almost upon him; frantic with fear and utterly unmanageable, as are all horses when they scent a lion. He was acutely conscious of a khaki clad figure that slipped from off the horse with a great pistol in its hand; as it slipped, the other hand dived into a saddle bag and appeared with another pistol.

The yellow face in the grass gave forth a short coughing roar and suddenly began to grow rapidly larger as the beast advanced in the scrambling rush that is a lion's charge.

Crash! The pistol in the right hand roared in front of his eyes.

The glaring yellow face charged ahead with appalling speed.

Crash! The pistol in the left hand.

Still the yellow face came on with frightful determination.

Crash! Crash! Crash! Right, left, right.

The hurtling face hung lower in the grass now. Plowed through the scrubby tufts. Slid forward in the dust. And then at last stopped, not ten feet distant. A great claw reached forward with its last ounce of strength and dug five deep furrows in the ground in its unquenchable determination to achieve its end. Then the yellow bulk was still.

Peterson heard the khaki person's voice at his side.

"Hm. That's as near as I care to have them come. And what you've gotta do, friend, is up and give your gun bearer a stiff dozen cuts of *kiboko*. He should have been behind you and should have fired when you quit functioning. You're new, I guess. You'll be the new consul, won't you?"

Peterson began to come back to life; but words came haltingly as yet.

"Why yes, I—I'm posted at Moyale. I—by Jove, I owe you—I have to thank you for my life. I—my name's Peterson."

The other grinned tolerantly at his confusion, though he made no move to respond to Peterson's self-introduction. But Peterson expanded under the kindly grin. He began to notice things. He saw a man tall and wiry and brown, exactly as had been those turbulent hunters of the Williams Hotel in Nairobi. This one had, perhaps, a wider and harder mouth than some, and looked at the world through amused, unwavering gray eyes. Words came to Peterson with a rush.

"I'm really most awf'ly obliged to you. I don't know how to say it; but—frightfully sporting of you. Just with a revolver. If you hadn't barged in like you did I suppose I'd have been pretty sick by now. Jolly plucky thing, I call it."

The other still grinned amusedly, and there was easy banter in his mimicry of the youngster's idioms.

"Not so frightfully awfully, don't you know?"

Peterson's speech was as his national religion—established. That was the way people talked, of course. Everybody talked like that; that is to say, all *sahibs*. It could not occur to him that it might sound curious to a mere foreigner. And anyway, he was still too confused to notice any trace of amusement in the other's voice, which was going on in easy explanation.

"I saw this fellow slide down off a rock *kloof* and take after you. But you were so blamed intent on your stalk that you never looked around. That's a rule of the bush, my boy: never stalk more'n a hundred yards without looking to see that you're not being stalked yourself."

"But I—I never thought—" stammered Peterson.

"Yeah; so I could see. So I lit out after you. I wasn't out for meat—just covering distance—so my gun boy was trailing along somewhere with the *shenzis;* else I might mebbe have scared this beggar off with a couple long shots. I was aiming to scare your pair of buck away at long range so you'd sit up an' take notice. But you sure were sot."

Peterson thought guiltily of the unworthy motives which he had mentally ascribed to this shooting maniac, and he murmured something again about its being jolly sporting.

The gray eyes twinkled at the persistent Anglicism.

"Mm-hm. A coupla Colt .45 guns throw a pretty heavy punch at close range. Heavy enough for Mr. Simba—if you don't miss. But all the same, another rule of the bush is: never to go out in lion country with less than a .145 rifle; and if you've got one of your first class British .157's, so much the better."

A powerfully built native with a rifle slung over his shoulder came up leading the runaway horse. The man looked at the dead lion without emotion, taking it as a matter of course, but the horse plunged and snorted with white staring eyes at the body. The man declaimed something in the sonorous Galla tongue, which the khaki person answered quickly. Then he said to Peterson:

"You'll excuse me, I'm sure. I've let my *safari* out of my sight for longer than I like. I must be after them, or God knows what monkey foolishness they'll likely pull off. That's another rule. Always watch your own *safari*. I'll leave my gun boy with you. He can skin your lion. I guess you'd like to keep the pelt as a souvenir of your first meeting with one."

He climbed into the saddle as he spoke; and Peterson noticed for the first time that it was what he would call a "Mexican," which, to his inherited insular prejudices, seemed a curious and clumsy thing; although it is the most comfortable saddle in the world for hard work. He felt that this parting, after what had happened, was astonishingly, almost scandalously, informal; and his mind, struggling to do the right thing, fell back upon the standard convention of his kind throughout all Africa and the East.

"I say—er—won't you come and have dinner at my bungalow tonight?"

The other called over his shoulder:

"Thanks much. I'd like to. I'll be overnighting in your town and it'll be right nice."

And Peterson realized that he did not yet know his deliverer's name.

THAT dinner was a memorable one to Peterson. It was crammed full of information; about natives, about beasts and their ways; about *safari* travel; about that mysterious independent country, Abyssinia, to the north. And somehow the information carried a different impression to Peterson than that handed out by Sanford. It was not laid down as gospel as was Sanford's; it was easy, rather, and anecdotal; yet it carried unquestioning conviction.

But Peterson was forced pointedly to ask his guest his name.

"I tried to get it from your gun boy," he explained, "but he didn't seem to understand my boy's language."

The other laughed.

"Oh, my name? Didn't I tell you? Smith—" and the unwavering eyes looked into their host's with such steady effrontery that they almost carried complete conviction. "But you'll get nothing out of my Gallas. They're top hole people, the Zulus of the North. They darn' nearly cleaned up Abyssinia once; and the Abyssinians are fighters, let me tell you.

They licked the tar out of the Italians in 1906 and took a war indemnity out of them, as I suppose you know. But the Gallas may clean them up yet. All my boys are Gallas, though I use Woitos for porters. Gallas are too proud to port."

Peterson was just then too intent upon other absorbing topics to notice incidental details. Smith was all that he needed to address his guest. His experience of the afternoon was fresh in his mind. He wanted to know about lions, how to shoot them, where to aim; everything, in fact, to avoid a repetition of his so nearly disastrous experience.

Mr. Smith was immediately serious. Lions were always a serious matter. Nobody knew what they might or might not do. They might run like whipped dogs for no reason at all; or they might crouch in lordly indifference to everything; or they might charge with terrible ferocity for no reason at all. One had to be ever alert and ready for every eventuality.

"There's only one way to shoot lion," said Mr. Smith. "On foot; a good heavy gun; a good gun bearer with another gun; and a good nerve. Heart or head shot if you have time; and if he charges, hold your ground and slam him on the white spot on his chin, and keep on slamming him as long as he keeps coming. That'll smash the jaw and plow up the chest and vitals. And if you don't stop him with all that, say your prayers."

The twinkle began to grow again in the quiet eyes.

"There's another way, though I don't suggest it to you. That's the way of a lot of your lordlings and our fat millionaires who come here on picnic parties to get photographs of their big game trophies into the home rotogravures. Shoot them right out of automobiles with the engine running for a quick getaway. There was a well advertised American Amazon who came out and slaughtered five lions that way. I believe she had a barbed wire fence round her car too. Vreeden took her out from Nairobi and he told me about it."

Peterson remembered something about that story and the disgust it had left behind. There was much more that he wanted to know about lions before he turned to another subject of mystery. That great gray horse, the miraculous presence of which in this *tsetse* fly country had undoubtedly been the vehicle for saving his life. Mr. Smith's ready grin was full of pleased reminiscence.

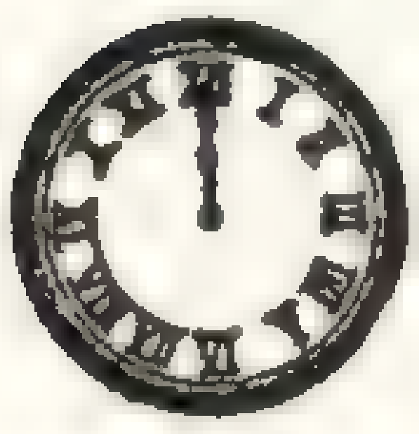
"Ah, that's a whole story in itself. You've heard about this new German dope, haven't you? Invented by the same wizard who discovered that plasmochin stuff that the German drug people are boosting to knock the spots out of quinine for malaria?"

Peterson had not heard.

"No? Why, it was tried out right here in Kenya. This big medico prof produced it and claimed that it was the absolute goods for sleeping sickness and horse pest. So of course all the other medicos who hadn't discovered it said they were from Missouri. So the old prof showed them. He came out here and let them infect a hundred horses and mules and round up a hundred sleepy niggers; and he injected them with his bugs, and the whole darn' bunch recovered. Then the other medicos just about kissed him and said that this was an epochal discovery for the whole of Africa and, in fact, for the whole world. And the prof said, 'Yes, and we'll give it to the world when the world gives us back our colonies.' And since then they've guarded the stuff like radium. Nobody can get it for any price."

Peterson was absorbed. What a world of romance there was in that simple little tale. He recollected now having heard something about it. It was true. Highly placed personages, saddled with the burden of making *safari* arrangements for even higher placed personages, had tried officially to obtain some of the precious stuff in order that the mighty ones might ride rather than wear out the august shoe leather upon the burning plain. But the fiercely patriotic scientists had remained grimly deaf to their wiles. How, then, had this coolly smiling person managed to— Peterson blurted the question. Mr. Smith shook his head.

"Mm-mm. No, that's a secret deep and dark. Suffice it to say that the prof who demonstrated brought more of his dope than needed; and that there have been mixed into the subsequent story two Armenians and a Greek trader and a Portugee; and the Portugee won't even tell his father confessor. Enough that I've got enough of it to have a horse in *tsetse* country."



IT WAS a long and intensely interesting evening. Midnight pointed from the round tin alarm clock on the mantel shelf before the raconteur of stark adventure in the first person got up and knocked his pipe out at the open window. Peterson's heart welled over with friendliness toward his guest, so that he felt constrained to offer him that rare privilege—official assistance in so far as might be possible.

In East Africa *safari* porters have been so spoiled by extravagantly conducted parties, and their own needs of life are so small, that they can afford to be more than merely independent. A friendly government official can do much with local chiefs to fill out a crew depleted by desertion and the simple native disease of, "Me sick. Ow-how pain im gut, no can go." Which sickness always occurs near a large and comfortable village.

But Mr. Smith was easily independent.

"Thanks much; but I guess that I can scratch along all right. None of your overpaid one-shilling-one-day *shenzis* for me, with a paternally dumb government ready to back them up in skipping out of a contract as soon as they set up a howl of forced labor. No, sir; I use Woitos. He no work, bimeby I tell him he chief, he catch *kiboko*. And in my opinion that's the only way in which the African can be made to understand that he's taken up a contract to do a certain job for a certain length of time. Thanks all the same. I guess that I'll be away with my outfit before you're up tomorrow. Going eastward along the border. Guess I'll be running into your big chief, the deputy commish, somewhere along the line. So this'll be goodby, till our trails maybe cross again sometime."

Peterson lay awake far into the morning. His mind was too full of jumbled events to permit sleep. The startling day, the fascinating talk of the evening, the things he had learned—all these went racing through his brain in a confusion of vivid pictures.

And as they raced, thoughts began to take form. Idle guessings; vague surmises. This man Smith. What a colorful personality! What an impression of quiet force that laughed at the world and—with rueful admisssion—at most people in it; or rather, to be more accurate, at *some* of the people in it; prominent people! That innocent allusion to the "big chief." Surely there had been a hint of raillery in the gray eyes at the unnecessary adjective that qualified the word chief. Still, this man was an American; and you never knew just what their queer speech meant. But then again, that abbreviation, the commish. That was hardly a respectful way to speak of so important an official of the Colonial Government. But this man was very clearly no respecter of persons.

The unformed ideas, as they raced along the tide of thought, began to cluster themselves round this strong snag of outthrust personality and to take form. Mere shapes at first; but presently connecting incidents drifted in and began to mold the whole. Where had he heard a description that seemed to fit just this Mr. Smith?

Peterson struggled with that vague memory for awhile, and then suddenly the picture flashed through to him. The big room in the Williams Hotel. Sanford, flushed and furious in his importance. And a voice that spoke of a man who knew much about lions; who knew, in fact, what a lion would think. A man who got things done without making a fuss. A man who scorned official favor. All these things fitted this Mr. Smith most marvelously. Peterson felt pleased that he had connected up this identity.

And then suddenly the drifting thoughts bunched together into a monstrous shape, a thing of horror.

Peterson was suddenly wholly awake. Good gosh! This man about whom the argument had waxed so hot in the hotel had been that infamous slave runner fellow. This Smith couldn't be that fellow. It was too absurd. This was a splendid chap; one of the very best. And that other fellow—King, the name was—he was dead, of course. Sanford had verified that story himself.

Peterson was pleased that there could not be any sort of connection between this top hole chap and that other frightful character, that fellow who was, of course, quite dead.

But then again the insidious reflection that this man was obviously what Sanford had called a damned Yankee forced itself. And he had come down, on his own showing, from Abyssinia and—was his name really Smith? It had seemed almost as though—

There was no hope of sleep for Peterson that night. He tossed in his bed, torn with doubts; in a quandary of conflicting emotions; divided against himself in a maze of thoughts through all of which the word duty loomed.

With the morning Peterson was pale and ringed under the eyes. But his lips were set. He went straight into his little office and did a very curious thing, difficult to understand; for he was really a young man of the best of ethics. He wrote a laborious letter, full of explanations and fears and apologies; and then, summoning his East Indian office clerk, he instructed him to turn the letter over to the official messenger with orders to convey it as fast as he knew to the camp of the deputy commissioner, a full week's journey distant to the east.

Difficult it is to understand this conduct in a man of normally decent tendencies; yet understanding is possible. For the service of his country in his own little sphere in that far flung corner of the world; Peterson felt that his superior should know of the monstrous suspicion that had occurred to him, and of all the facts relating thereto.

The man Smith had undoubtedly saved his life and had otherwise impressed him as being a splendid type of man. But duty, as he saw it, demanded that he report his suspicion to his superior. And so his laborious letter, tied into the crotch of a split stick, went off by a runner with instructions that it be delivered swiftly and with all the blundering secrecy of officialdom.

THE MAN Smith sat in the shade of a giant fig tree whose broad, flat roots arched down a shelving ravine bank to a muddy little stream. Packs strewed the ground. Porters lounged in the uncouth attitudes of the African; some with ox stolidity chewing a few grains of their day's *potio,* some lying flat on their stomachs in the blazing sun, as heat proof as lizards.

Many hundreds of little white whiskered gray monkeys chattered in the higher branches of the great tree, feeding on the dusty, rather tasteless fruit and performing all the half human antics that make monkeys so fascinating to watch.

Mr. Smith lay back to smoke his after lunch pipe and watch the monkeys with a lazy smile. He was conscious of his head gun bearer standing waiting for permission to speak. He knew that something urgent was on the boy's mind, but he knew his African well enough to know that his own dignity demanded that he let the boy wait awhile before he said with stupefying omniscience:

"Well, Baroungo, it is in your mind to speak of that messenger who runs from the consul *bwana,* to the dipty c'mish *bwana;* yes?"

"*Hau tamwaku!* How does *Bwana* know one messemger fella run with letter?"

Smith's eyes twinkled. It was always good, whenever possible, to impress one's African boys with a sense of one's hidden knowledge. As a matter of fact his bluff was based on a shrewd guess. He knew his official as well as he knew his African, and he was just about sure that young Peterson's tortured conscience would send a letter; and it was for just that reason that he had made an excuse to leave one of his boys behind at the last village with orders to bring on some native tobacco which would take a few hours to prepare. All this was a simple subtlety that went far beyond Baroungo's perceptions. The boy proceeded with his eager information.

"Danakwa he come long bring tobac; he tell one messemger come quick-quick, got letter go for east. That man run sof'ly-sof'ly now 'long that side."

He pointed with his chin beyond the next low parallel swell of the plain.

"Hm," the white man commented half to himself. "That letter must be stopped."

"Yes, *Bwana.* Two spear man stand ready for run; stop um one time."

"Mm-mm. Your enthusiasm is commendable, Baroungo; but it carries you too far. He mustn't be killed. He must lose that letter—without force—or he will have a story to tell. He must lose it through his own carelessness. Then he will sit in some village for a week or so and will go back and say that the letter is delivered and that there is no answer; and the consul *bwana* does not as yet know how to get truth out of him."

Baroungo was once more impressed with his master's wisdom. As an African himself, he knew that that was exactly what the messenger would do.

Danakwa was a good man for that thing, he agreed, though with reluctance; and added almost in soliloquy—

"All same one messenger if he die through own careless, he no tell lie, no tell true."

"You render a good paraphrase of a trite axiom, my good Baroungo," said his Master. "Many wise men have so thought before you; and white men at that. All the same you let Danakwa understand that if that messenger dies through anybody's careless, there will be *kiboko.* Send Danakwa to me anyhow. But first, what talk have you gathered from the villages about Matteo bin Ibrahim?

"Talk is, *Bwana,* that Ibrahim go by way Dawa River; he got plenty people his chain, mebbe one hunda, two hunda fella."

"Dawa River, hm? That's faster than we thought. Double trek from now, Baroungo, else we won't meet up with him. Tell the men plenty work four, five day, one piece cloth *backsheesh.* Bustle. Send Danakwa here."

DEPUTY Commissioner Sanford was in camp near the Dawa River. In the most secret camp that he knew how to devise. The Dawa River formed the border line of that angular point of Kenya Northern Territory that wedged itself in between Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland. It was a curious river of tumbling rapids and sluggish, miniature lakes; full of great barbeled catfish and fat, pinky-gray hippopotami, which by their pig-like tameness indicated that this last wedge of British territory was a very isolated place indeed.

Across the river to the north lay Abyssinia; a good six weeks' journey from the capital Addis Abeba, and therefore as isolated as the neighboring British wedge. To the south was another sluggish river, full of mud and crocodiles, called the Dukula, or Bushbok River. Beyond it the country sloped away to the deserts of Italian Somaliland.

The British wedge between the two consisted of country cut up by deep *dongas* with perpendicular sides; dry, sandy bottom just now, forming long, winding concealed tunnels along which one might travel for days without exposing oneself on the plain. Good country in which to hide.

Farther to the east the Dukula River converged upon the Dawa at a mud village called Mandera. Important to Sanford, because it marked the extreme tip of the Kenya Northern Territory wedge, and stationed there was an outpost guard of a quarter company of King's African Rifles. Good men, recruited from the best of the fighting tribes of Africa and splendidly trained by the hard boiled type of individual whom Kipling has named Sergeant Whatshisname.

Deputy Commissioner Sanford's *safari* was encamped in the bed of a deep *donga.* It had traveled along the beds of ravines for many days. The few natives who had shown their fuzzy black heads over the *donga* edges during the march had been immediately seized and compelled to stay with the cautious expedition. This was drastic and opposed to the regular colonial policy of pacification. But it had been vitally necessary; for, had these nomads been permitted to go, they would have jabbered the news of the secret *safari* all over the countryside.

The need for all this secrecy was that Deputy Commissioner Sanford had received news that somewhere on the other side of the Dawa River, in Abyssinian territory, lurked that arch-scoundrel, Matteo bin Ibrahim, working his way east with a big train of slaves. If the deputy commissioner could contrive to lure Matteo across the river into British territory before he passed Mandera, he would have him on the hip, red handed with the goods; and the menace of Matteo would then be safely disposed of in a good colonial jail for a few years.

If Matteo were once to pass Mandera before he ventured out of Abyssinian territory, he would be safe; because then his jockeying back and forth would be into Italian Somaliland; and Sanford's opinion about the Italian colonial administration would have given shame to a good ape.

Sanford's hope, therefore, his anxious dream, was to lure the slave runner across the river before it would be too late. The lure consisted of some forty runaway slaves whom Sanford had rounded up and was holding as bait.

A K. A. R. man, a thick lipped Shankala with crisp woolly hair, had been carefully coached to go across the river posing as a dull witted runaway, to let himself get captured by Matteo's men, and then to tell the tale of the two-score other slaves who huddled in a bewildered heap on the British side.

It was a good trick, and it ought surely to work—if no news of the careful ambush should have leaked across the river. Sanford had taken every precaution. He had traveled only in ravine bottoms; he had sternly suppressed all loud speech —which, with an African *safari,* is close to a miracle. He had done more; he had even prevented the howling of interminable wordless songs at night, which proclaimed Sanford, in his way, a great man.

* * *

EVERYTHING had been done to preserve secrecy, and Sanford was almost sanguine, this time, of the results. With Matteo stowed away, the principal menace of the border land would be removed, and all those slaves could be released to their own devices, free and unhampered—which would be, in ninety per cent. of the cases, to drift about aimlessly near the border, yearning with animal instinct for the pasturage they knew, till they would be gathered in again by some swift raid of some alert scamp who followed in Matteo bin Ibrahim's footsteps.

The other ten per cent. would return of their own accord into Abyssinia, nurturing some dull idea that this time they would be able to hide away in some isolated village among people who talked their own language and who lived in the same unworried state of insanitation to which they themselves, by long years of heredity and personal inclination, were so lovingly addicted.

The much harassed deputy commissioner thought that he saw success; therefore he was startlingly and disagreeably surprised when a frightened boy stood before his tent and chattered that a *bwana isana* was coming to visit him.

"What's that? An important white man? Who the— Do you know this man, N'goma?"

The boy had been with Sanford for a long time and he knew most of the white men in the Northern Territory by sight.

"*Bwana,*" he chattered. "I do not know this man; but it looks like the ghost of that Kingi *Bwana* who was eaten by a lion."

"What the blazing devil!"

Sanford was out of his cot as fast as a lightweight, and at the flap of his tent. And there his incredulous eyes saw a sight that dropped his heart like lead down to his *veld* boots—the man Smith strolling unconcernedly toward him through the middle of his carefully hidden and guarded camp. The man grinned at him with cheerful effrontery.

"Hello, Dip'ty C'mish. Howya? I'll bet your boy told you I was a ghost; he scuttled from me like a jackal."

Sanford's gorge rose; that is to say, his heart climbed slowly up from his boots until it stuffed his throat. This beastly apparition meant, he was sure, the end of everything. All his careful plans; all his precautions upon which he had so plumed himself; his whole long and arduous trip—all gone by the board.

The shattering of his hopes was too complete and sudden to be realized all at once. He was conscious only of a leaden hopelessness that crushed overwhelmingly all further action. On top of it all mounted slowly a growing rage; and directed, with that curious dominance of trivialities that asserts itself in times of crisis, not at the upsetting of all his plans, but at the comparatively unimportant matter of the man's easy familiarity toward him.

The dignity of his official position demanded a respectful address from all but his intimate friends—who were very few; and required a "sir" from all subordinate officials. And here was this unspeakable foreigner addressing him with cool insolence by what he knew in his secret heart was the term which the natives used in speaking of him.

Many men in Africa, most men in fact, have been content to accept their native titles and to let themselves be so addressed with a laugh, hoping only that the shrewd characterizations thus implied might not be too insulting to their *amour propre*. But the deputy commissioner was that type of aloof official that never unbends. Personal respect is their religion. And here this particular bugbear of his addressed him as "dip'ty c'mish." Yet all that he could voice just then was his poignant disappointment in the blurted words—

"I thought you had been killed by a lion."

The man grinned with wrinkled nose in enjoyment of a successful coup.

"Yeah. It was necessary for my purposes that certain people should think Kingi *Bwana* was safely dead. I drilled those two Kavirondos in their talk for a good week before I sent them out. Did you think that they sounded fishy at all?"

THE READY choler began to rise to Sanford's face and the veins in his thick neck swelled. So he had been made a fool of by a brace of Kavirondo savages? He, the deputy commissioner of the district, who had gone to the trouble in his eagerness to question them himself, and had convinced himself to his own official satisfaction that the circumstantial tale was true. And there stood the very man who had engineered the hoax, lean and hard and disgustingly healthy, grinning widely over his scheme.

But the fellow did worse; he heaped insult upon the already grave injury to Sanford's pride in his own acumen. He fished a crumpled oiled silk wrapper from the breast pocket of his khaki coat and unrolled it with little clucks and sighs of complaint.

"I just dropped in to bring you a letter that your consul *bwana* at Moyale was sending; his messenger very carelessly lost it. I fancy he got suspicious about me. Shows perspicacity. You got the makin's of a good youngster there, Dip'ty *Bwana*. 'Fraid it's kind of wet, 'cause I had to swim that filthy river—must have been raining somewhere back in the hills there. And you just can't keep these darn' pouches leak proof, for all the lies they advertise. Dammit, my cigars are all damp too—have to pull like a vacuum cleaner. Don't mind if I sit down in your nice shiny new camp stool, eh, and powwow? Pah! My matches are just about melted. Boy, bring fire for light cigaroo!"

Deputy Commissioner Sanford choked and red swam before his eyes. And there was where he made a great mistake. There was no real reason for so much anger. Kingi *Bwana*—had been scrupulously polite. No fault could be found with him on that score. In fact even Sanford, if he had taken time to think, would have found it difficult to say for just what reason he was finding fault. But he did not think.

It was sufficiently galling that this man who, he was assured, had been a thorn in his side throughout nearly two years of endeavor, should be standing there, safe and alive and so damnably sure of himself; that he should have known, as he apparently had known, all about the carefully concealed *safari* all the time; that he should have strolled so easily into the very center of the camp in spite of all the precautions of armed sentries; and to cap it all, that he should have been so exasperatingly familiar, so utterly wanting in respect.

That last was a charge which might with justice have been brought against King. And he, for his part, would instantly have admitted it. His perfectly unaffected question would have been: just what was there to respect? An official position? A large man who could not control his temper? He was willing to treat anybody as a free citizen and an equal; but was he to come and kowtow? That was far from King's way. He was blood brother to those sturdy hunters in the Williams Hotel who kowtowed to nobody.

"Let's sit and have an *indaba*, Dip'ty *Bwana*. I've got a proposition to make to you."

The serene effrontery of the suggestion gave words to Sanford. What the proposition might be, he never stopped to consider; he was assured in advance that nothing but infamy could come from this man who, he was convinced, was a partner in the foul business of the halfbreed whom he had been hoping to catch. Burning words gushed from his throat.

"I want to hear no propositions from you, Mr. King. I want to have no dealings with you. I can have no sort of connection or compromise with any beastly thing that you may ever do without befouling myself. The bestial trade that you ply makes you unfit to talk to a decent human being—"

Such, and many more, were the scorching words that tumbled from Sanford. His face swelled and he sweated as he poured out his denunciation.

And it was therein that he made his great mistake. Kingi *Bwana* had come in peace to make him a certain proposition which the official might very well have accepted. He had come unarmed, having left his weapons somewhere on account of having to swim the river. That in itself should have been sufficient evidence that he had not come with any wanton thought of making trouble. But Sanford's hysterical hostility quite naturally repelled him. What the deputy commissioner's official acumen had convinced him of or had not convinced himself of was no business of King's to inquire, or to explain away.

He was—thank God, he thought—free, white and twenty-one. Above all, free; no bought and paid for official, sworn under oath for all the rest of his life to let unseen superiors in distant places do all his thinking for him and shape all his future deeds according to rules in a book. He was no enslaved subordinate to Sanford, to have to pander to the man's pompous ego, to explain his comings and his goings and to justify his doings.

The deputy commissioner's attitude had suddenly made the relationship between them acutely personal. Not the most reckless of the hunters at Nairobi would have spoken to Kingi *Bwana* in that manner without being ready to back up his words with something very much more substantial than talk. King remained sitting in the camp chair and sucked prodigious puffs from his damp cigar. He still grinned, though now only with his lips; but his long legs lazily drew up and tucked themselves under the stool, and his feet shuffled away the loose pebbles and sand from under them.

"Mm-hm," he mouthed over his cigar. "Seems like you don't like me so much. Well, Mr. Deputy Commissioner Sanford, what d'you figure you dare to do about it?"

Let credit be given to Sanford. His neck veins distended more purple than ever. His shoulders hunched—and King braced his feet for a quick spring.

BUT no fight was to take place just then. The K. A. R. sergeant came up on a run, saluted quickly and, so important was his communication, that he plunged instantly into a whispered gabble. Sanford's first impulse, in deference to his official dignity, was to push the man from him, curse him for his impudence and make his rush at King. But a phrase of the whispered message caught his ear. It arrested all other action. Without word or look to King, Sanford caught the sergeant by the arm and strode several paces away. King remained sitting, pulling at his cigar with an affectation of exaggerated enjoyment. Sanford demanded fiercely of the sergeant:

"Now what is this story? Tell me straight and quick."

The sergeant replied in urgent undertones:

"Sar, this thing true. One scout come, he say Ibrahim come cross river by Malolo *boma;* sof'ly ask news 'bout this side slave. This scout my man. He see Ibrahim self; got three, four man with. He run one time bring news."

Sanford's heart jumped. Fate, it seemed, in spite of this King fellow, was playing for once into his hand. It looked as though, deprived temporarily of King's clever brain, the other arch scoundrel had made a blunder. It was Sanford's chance to leap upon this misplay. If Ibrahim were indeed on the British side, as seemed to be miraculously true, the thing to do was to march immediately with every available man and to cut off his retreat. Sanford hardly hoped to surprise the crafty old villain in a native thorn fenced village where some chattering fool would surely give a warning. But, the man's retreat once cut off, the chances were good of rounding him up before he could get back.

Sanford commenced to give quick orders to the sergeant to get all his men ready for immediate trek.

And then cold lead suddenly dragged his flushed hopes down to dead bottom. His eyes fell upon King, sitting coolly there, puffing at his cigar patiently. That pestiferous thorn in his side hampered his every move, even here! What to do with that menace? If he were to go off suddenly he felt a chill certainty that the man would contrive in some way to outwit him and to convey a warning to his partner. Sanford's mind raced over the pros and cons of the situation.

What the devil and all could he do? Arrest him, the thought came. But on what grounds? He had no evidence. As the voice in the Williams Hotel had jeered, he would need a lot more evidence than this mere personal conviction. It was against all precedent of law to arrest a man without a single grain of evidence; and Sanford was stanch British official enough to respect the sacrosanct law. Yet the need was desperate. The man must be disposed of.

Suppose he were to manage to arrest King, and to quarrel through the legality of the action later in the Nairobi courts—what a howl would be raised about that by every turbulent free citizen in the whole colony! But suppose, in the furtherance of his duty, he were to do the thing. What would he do with his prisoner?

Bind him hand and foot? The thought lingered hopefully, but found little encouragement. Sanford had an uneasy respect for the capabilities of that coolly efficient person whose reputation was that he got things done the way he wanted. People had been tied up before by experts; and sometimes, somehow, some of them had contrived to escape. This man looked uncomfortably like one of those who would contrive.

Desperately, then, he asked the sergeant—

"How many of your men are necessary to guard that man?"

The sergeant covered his mouth with his hand as he gasped at the thought.

"*Awa!* To guard that Kingi *Bwana? M'beku!* That man like devil, sar. He know witch magic. Ten, fifteen men for guard that fella."

So that was the sergeant's opinion of it. Sanford plucked at a button of his shooting coat in his quandary. His nerves, already ragged, were beginning to get the better of him. Instant action was necessary if he hoped to catch Ibrahim; and that man sitting stolidly there, as hard and unconcerned as a stone, was driving him into a frenzy. But the sergeant had an idea to propound; an idea born of Africa; one that had, upon occasion, stood the test of practise.

"You want know what do with that fella, sar? I tell. Batta *boma*, two hour fum heah, Malolo road. Got plenty trouble with lion. Batta fellas got one lion trap. Puttum this Kingi *Bwana* lion trap inside. He sit comf'ble shuah till you fetch."

SANFORD walked back to where King sat, still enjoying his cigar. The deputy commissioner's lips were set and the blood had ebbed away from his face. He was going to do an unexpected thing. In fact, a quite brave thing. The more one sized up the man King, the more uncompromisingly hard and physically efficient he looked; and Sanford was ruefully conscious of his own unnecessary weight, though he had lost much during the course of his strenuous expedition.

But the thing was necessary The effectiveness of the little K. A. R. force would have to be conserved as much as possible. He could not afford to have a sick and disabled list. It was up to him—it was his duty—to keep King in play and to hold all of his attention for as long as might be possible. Sanford therefore walked up to King with his lips set and commenced the play.

"Well, Mr. King, you were going to say something I think, when I was interrupted."

King's eyebrows lifted. He had not given Sanford credit for this. His feet gathered under him again and he said:

"Your move, Dip'ty *Bwana.* I asked what you figured you dared to do about things."

Sanford moistened his lips. King was so coldly direct. There was to be no time gained holding him in play with words. The actual physical play would have to last longer than Sanford had hoped. But he faced his trial.

"I dare, Mr. King, if you dare to stand up to me, to put into practise what I think of you."

King suddenly grinned widely.

"Good for you, Mr. Commissioner. I'll hand it to you. As for me, I take back some of the things I thought. If you like, I'll shake hands before we start in to argue."

But Sanford was not going to descend to that familiarity. He detested everything he had ever known about this man, and he felt that he degraded himself by this personal conflict which he had forced himself to undertake only on account of its desperate necessity.

"That is not necessary," he said shortly, and took off his coat.

King, unhurried, looked him over appraisingly. He saw big shoulders and broad chest, massive looking legs, sturdy calves beneath the puttees; and under the shirt, below the broad chest, more of a protuberance than an altogether healthy stomach needed.

"Humph," he commented impersonally. "You've lost quite some weight, haven't you? All the same, you won't be aiming to drag this out to an endurance test. Guess your game will be rush and slug for a quick finish. Got about thirty pounds weight on me, eh? What d'you run to? 'Bout two hundred and ten? I ought to scale around one eighty-five. That's not too much weight to give away, 'cause I'll bet I'm a lot faster on my feet. Tell you what. I'll bet you fifty dollars on the side I'll outlast you. What d'you say? Just to make it interesting."

Sanford's anger began to rise again. This unspeakable person harbored the persistent conviction that he could meet a high government official on a basis of equality. The very idea of the proposed bet was an insult. Besides, Sanford was not going into this thing with any reasonable hope of winning; he knew, better than the other could guess, how short he was of wind. His plan was no more than to keep King's attention fully occupied for as long as possible. He would gladly have strung out a little time in preliminary talk. But King slipped out of his coat with a sinuous movement of his shoulders and began to glide, to prowl rather, round him with the alert intentness of one of the greater felines.

"Don't care to bet?" he purred regretfully. "Well, all right. Up to you to start. My game'll be to tire you out."

BUT Sanford did not know where to start. He had little confidence of being able to land on that gliding body anywhere. It was King who commenced. Like a leopard leaping at an opening it has seen, King came in. There was a swift sound of two short steps, and—*smack-thud-smack!* Face, body and neck, Sanford felt light but stinging blows. He drove a heavy right at the face in front of him, and hit only an open hand; and then, *smash!* The hardest fist he had ever met slugged in under his ear.

Sanford's head buzzed and water welled into his eyes. Through the haze he discerned the face again, head thrust forward, peering at him through searching eyes. The impersonal voice came once more.

"Shucks. Just a little too far back. I sure wished you that one on the end of the jaw. But you're slower than I thought, brother. I'll give you odds on that bet if you like."

The water in Sanford's eyes became oddly streaked with running flashes of red. That last blow had stung and—curse the fellow, he fought apparently without the least animus; as if he were engaged in a boxing bout with a friend, damn him! And the way he dissected one's capabilities was an insult. Brother!

The swimming eyes saw something beyond King's back—the sergeant and some ten of his men gathering for the rear attack. They had come sooner than he expected. Here was where he had to engage all of King's attention. He drew a deep breath and rushed, slugging with both hands. The heavy fists met flesh; hard flesh of arms and elbows that thrust the blows aside. Something hit him with sickening force in the throat, though not hard enough to stop him; and then he clung in a clinch. Quick hands covered his arms and the hated voice breathed upon his neck.

"How d'you want to do this? Hitting in clinches, or a clean break?"

Sanford answered nothing. For one thing, his throat muscles were numbed by the blow; and for another, the need for speech was past. He clung desperately in his clinch, all his energies devoted to just holding his opponent harmless.

And then clutching black arms and a hell's uproar enveloped them both.

From King came a sharp hiss of intaken breath, a gasped, "You filthy crook!" And then he fought in earnest. Like a monstrously magnified attack of ants upon a hard shelled beetle that fight was. Except that the heaving black mass howled. To the African, as to the ape, fight and noise are coincident. The one can not exist without great volume of the other. And in this case the Africans had to bolster up with noise their courage to attack a man of whom they were mortally afraid.

Every now and then above the din rose a high pitched shriek of anguish as the overwhelmed victim found opportunity to apply some especially venomous means of hurt. The strong odor of unwashed Africa hung in the still air of the *donga.*

But gradually the heaving mass of flesh began to struggle with less and less violence. The end, with such odds, was as inevitable as when the driver ants make their battles.

Slowly the fight subsided. Already rope was in evidence. Presently Sanford backed out of the mêlée, disheveled, clothes torn, but elated. One after another the natives stood back, rolling white eyeballs and champing protruding lips. The atavistic impulse to rend with strong teeth was barely suppressed. One squatted, hugging a twisted knee and moaning as only a native can moan; another, with screwed face, nursed a wrenched shoulder. Minor injuries were many; but the end that had been gained amply repaid the cost.

King, the redoubtable Kingi *Bwana*, lay exhausted. Swathed positively with ropes; foul smelling, greasy cords that had been used for heaven knew what filthy purposes. His shirt had been ripped from him; his skin clawed and scratched; his mouth full of grit and dirt. A sorry figure.

He spoke no word. He looked with the one eye that was not closed with sand, as though impressing the faces of his captors in his mind. The men covered their mouths to prevent the entry of evil eye and moved out of range. Sanford's voice broke on the spell.

"Hurry up there now, Sergeant. Get your men together. You, Umgate, stay in *boma* with porters. All other camp boys come."

The start was surprisingly quick. Everything had been ready for days for just such a swift raid. Within fifteen minutes the little force was on trek. King, lashed to a pole like a captured reptile, was carried by four brawny soldiers in relays. He spoke only at intervals—with each new relay. To each unwilling four he said the same thing.

"Four men. To each one, four jackals, four hyenas, four vultures, four months."

It was gibberish. But the men groaned; and, as each one repeated King's story, horror and superstition grew. Each relay began to be more difficult to supply, till Sanford himself had to select the men and order them to their gruesome job.

King had no idea as yet just what use he could make of the fear thus engendered. He did the thing on principle. He knew that a frightened African was very close to a creature without reason; and he fired his shafts of suggestion at a venture, gambling in futures. In any case he felt not averse to making those Africans as uncomfortable as he could.

* * *

BUT no immediate fruit was born of his craft. The time was too short. Two hours from the camp was the lion trap that the people from the neighboring Batta village had built against the marauding beasts. King was still a prisoner when they arrived. He knew, of course, from the babble of the marching men, what the plan with regard to himself was; so his incarceration was no surprise to him.

Sanford quickly inspected the trap himself in the fast falling dusk. It was in good condition. It would hold even Kingi *Bwana* in security. This matter had been worrying him throughout the march. But this trap was in such good shape that no time need be lost in making repairs. With a great thankfulness he turned to his sergeant.

"Good. Throw that goat out and put the prisoner in. On the ground will do—Good heavens! He's tough enough not to die of lying on a mud floor."

For a fleeting moment of weakness he debated whether he should remove the ropes from the prisoner. But he hardened his heart. It was a good and stout trap, built to keep a lion in; but all the same, why take any chances with this man? The whole trip was too important. He ordered only that the pole by which King had been carried should be removed. That would be all the comfort that the prisoner deserved. King, from the gloomy interior, addressed him.

"Hey, polecat! Tell your gorillas to cover me with my coat against the mosquitos."

The insult was gross and deliberate.

King wanted his coat for his own reasons and he did not want Sanford to think too much about it. The very crudity of the attack brought success. Sanford's dignity blazed into fury at the affront. It is even possible that, had he been within the cage, he might in his fury have kicked the prisoner in the ribs for his impertinence. But Sanford was, after all, in spite of all his faults of inflated ego, a gentleman. And he felt, since he held all the cards, that he could afford to laugh at the insult. Sulkily he told the sergeant to cover the prisoner with the coat.

"Look to see that there's no knife in the pocket," he warned.

"No knife, sar," the sergeant reported. "He got knife in belt. I took it."

"All right, then. Cut that cord short at the door, else he'll be able to pull it up. Where are those two men who were hurt? They and one other stay on guard all night; loaded rifles. The rest march."

The sergeant cut the cord as directed. The heavy door crashed down behind its sill. The hubbub of orders commenced. King called from within his cage:

"Hey, Sanford— I'll tell you something. If you don't reach Malolo before three in the morning, Matteo will be gone. Better hurry an' run some of the fat off your paunch. You'll be faster for the next time we meet; an' let me tell you, you'll need it, big boy. An' I'll tell you something else when I get out of here. I'll tell you the story about the colonial official who went down a hole to fetch a skunk, and the skunk came out and fainted."

He heard the choked growl in Sanford's throat, and he grinned. He was in a fever really to drive the other away from there without giving him an opportunity to think coherently; and to this purpose he loosed all the poison in his tongue. An inspiration came to him.

"*Aho, Bwana M'kubwa!*" he shouted; and he commenced to call insulting messages in Swahili.

While Sanford himself did not altogether understand, he knew that every soldier of the K. A. R. would get the finer points. To be ridiculed before natives was a thing that not the meanest white man could stand. Sanford's furious cursing of hurry-up orders filtered into King through the bars of the cage. A hoarse guffaw from some appreciative soldier sounded above the confusion and was quickly shut off by a hand. It was the final straw.

"Get along there, Sergeant!" screamed Sanford. "March! What the devil is the delay?"

The confused shuffling and patter of bare feet, mingled with a low rhythmic grunting, sounded and immediately began to recede. In two minutes the last of it had faded into the falling night.

SANFORD had gone. He had been too furiously angry to think clearly, and he had forgotten one thing. King chuckled. Lesser shuffles and grunts sounded without the cage. King could picture the scene perfectly. Those rather bewildered natives left behind, not liking their job one little bit, and very uncomfortable. Much too bewildered with the swiftness of the departure and much too uncomfortable to remember the thing that Sanford had forgotten. King laughed outright. Immediately a low chatter of voices assured him that his three guards wondered nervously at the man who, in such a plight, could laugh.

King nodded to himself stiffly within his ropes; he knew that these men were in the right condition for him to work upon. Just how he would work or what he might achieve, he did not know yet; but he knew that a man who understood the minds of superstitious natives could work miracles with them.

He was not ready for them yet, anyhow; he was busy with his ropes. Yards of them there were, malodorous fathoms. But they gave him no anxiety. The African who can tie ropes does not exist. They will make ungainly bundles of the simplest things swathed with meaningless strings which will slip off in all directions; they will tie their crude rope bridges with a thousand knots, and will duly get drowned because some day the knots will give. The experience of their centuries has taught them a mule pack method with fifty foot lengths of rawhide which will slip twenty times in a day's trek.

Sanford of course knew enough to know that African roping required considerable supervision and revision. But he was in a hurry, goaded by that vicious tongue, and he relied on that stout cage and his three armed guards. No, King's ropes gave him no anxiety at all. Only some trouble. He devoted a steady hour of quiet effort to his ropes. Outside the night was coming on with the swiftness of the equatorial belt where there is no twilight.

Inside it was much too dark for the watchers to see between the stout wooden bars of the trap what the occupant did. In an hour's time King shook the last of the coils from his feet and rose softly and stretched. He was ready to take advantage of the thing that Sanford, in his hurry, had forgotten. It was a little thing. One that anybody, going away in a hurry, might forget.

That thing was fire.

That was the thought that King had tried to keep from Sanford's mind. Outside of his cage huddled three men. Three superstitious Africans in the open dark—without fire. Sanford had driven his force away without giving that matter a thought.

With characteristic improvidence the thought of fire had not occurred to the guards until the actual need was upon them. Not until they could no longer see did they feel the need for light; and which of them would then dare to run after the fast retreating column, or run through the goblin haunted night to the distant village to fetch a glowing coal wrapped in dried banana tree pith? And a certainty, of course, was that not one of the three would have matches. No African ever has matches; not even a house boy. They will come daily at lamp lighting time to *bwana* for a fire stick.

All this King knew. He had played for this; and the fact that no fire spluttered without his cage showed him that he had played right. He could afford to laugh, particularly since, in the pocket of his coat which he had demanded as a mosquito cover, was his oiled silk cigar case, and in it, in a camper's matchbox, sulphur matches.

THIS first move was to set about establishing fear in the minds of his guards. That ought not to be difficult. Matches would help. King carried, as do many Africanders who require a light in windy places, the old style sulphur matches. These are almost obsolete now in America on account of the fire hazard; but every camp outfitter in Africa has them on sale for those whose experience demands them. King therefore set gleefully about doing a match trick for the benefit of those who cowered in the dark. Making his voice sepulchral, he croaked—

"Three men sit without and watch in the dark, and from the outer dark watch the *anu-m'kusi*, the goblins who wait for the three."

Moaning whispers greeted this announcement which every one of the three knew to be true. And then a voice—

"*Aho, Bwana M'kubwa,* that is an ill talk."

"But a true talk, O three that have no fire," croaked King. "But what have I to do with the goblins who watch from the darkness of every tree without? I am within, and safe, though I lie bound—"

He knew that African goblins never enter enclosures built by man—houses, cages, or even thorn *bomas.* It is in the open dark that the malignant spooks of rock and tree prowl and pounce upon the backs of humans.

He left them with that cheering thought for a little time which he devoted to a quick inspection of his cage. He hoped little, for he knew these lion traps, and he hardly thought that Sanford would have been so foolish as to have overlooked any weakness.

The trap was the standard construction

—stout hardwood poles driven well into the earth in two parallel rows about a yard apart and brought together at the top and lashed. The shape was that of a long narrow tent with very steep walls. In order to set this trap the simple practise was to tie a goat at the far end of this tunnel where a lion, attracted by its scent, could see it through the spaces between the strong wooden bars, but could get at it only through the door at the other end. Once the marauder was inside its weight, treading upon a common trap fall, released the door.

It was this door that interested King most. A slim chance, he hoped there might be, that he could get hold of something and lift it. Its construction was crude but efficient. It consisted of a great slab of hardwood which ran up and down in grooves, like an ordinary window. At the bottom was a stout sill and the door fell, hot upon, but *outside* of this; the idea being that there would be presented no projection, no bottom edge, under which a lion might hook a claw and heave the thing up.

Anybody who has ever tried to open even a counterweighted window without getting finger purchase beneath one of the windowpane frames will realize how extremely efficient such a simple lion trapdoor can be. King felt all round the door edges with faint hope and with little disappointment when he found nothing. If only, he reflected, he had been able to drive Sanford away before he had thought of a knife, he would have been able to walk out at will. A stout blade driven into the door would give all the purchase needed; and as for the guards with loaded rifles, they worried him not at all.

But no such luck was attending King on this trip. He must revert to his original plan of frightening his guards. The sulphur match trick would help. He could not delay it much longer because presently an arc light moon would creep over the flat acacia tops. This trick required darkness. Out of his deepest belly tones rumbled his voice again:

"Turn your faces, O three who sit in the open dark. Hide your heads and be afraid to look. For I lie in evil case and I summon ghosts to do my bidding. The ghosts of men whom I have killed. Many I have killed; many more will I kill. Their spirits are my servants whom I call. I lie bound but they wander free in my cage. From all sides their green eyes shine upon me. Be afraid and hide, O three whom the tree ghosts watch from behind."

Of course the guards looked. Nervously and over their shoulders; but nothing could have prevented them from peeking. They saw the pale green glow of damp sulphur matches flitting in awesome pairs behind the poles of the trap. The horrible thing was true then. The prisoner lay bound—they knew that—and here were the ghostly eyes wandering fitfully, now high up, now low to the ground.

Then they did hide their heads; and they moaned the low quavering noises of the African in great fear. This man whom their evil fate it was to guard had a reputation among the natives for strange powers. Here was a very great witchcraft. They all knew, of course, that when one killed a man, if one knew the proper witch rites to apply, the spirit of the victim became the slave of the victor. And here was proof.

THE GUARDS cowered together in the clammy dark and groaned supplications to the *Bwana M'kubwa* not to put a haunt on them with his ghostly servants; they were poor men, soldiers; they did only what they were ordered.

"Very well," said King magnanimously. "Look. I have ordered my ghosts to loose my ropes and I am free. Open now this door and I give you promise that I shall order no spirit to sit upon your backs when it is dark."

But that was too much to demand of those men—as yet. They had been well drilled and the sense of obedience to the orders of their officer had been the most stringent of their teachings.

"*Awa, Bwana.* Tell us not this thing. We are poor men, but soldiers, and above all are we of the Kingis Africani Raifals. To open the door is against all order." And one, inspired by one of those unexpected streaks of native shrewdness, asked timidly, "Besides, *O Bwana M'kubwa*, if your ghost servants have been strong enough to open your cords, why not tell them also to open the door, and thus shall we be blameless?"

This was an unpleasant poser. A question that might upset the whole growing structure of terrorism. It would have to be disposed of at once, without hesitation. All the excuse that came to King was a lame one, but he had to make the most of it. His answer was almost immediate.

"Fools. How shall these go without to open the door? These are the ghosts of men whom I have killed in their own *bomas;* they can serve me only within. Since you are mule headed about the door, I must send for the ghosts of those whom I have killed in the open. Many they are and strong, and they come in many horrid shapes."

The piled up horrors were for the purpose of diverting the men's minds from the thinness of his excuse, and King did his oratorical best with them.

"With green eyes shining in the dark will they come and with a roaring of many tongues like the wind in the high trees. Prepare to greet them, O three who sit alone in the outer dark, for to those ghosts will your own spirits be added this night."

"*Ahoo! A warala hoo!*" wailed the wretched three.

With native propensity for terror, they could almost see the gibbering army of the dead already. And that wicked prophesy about their own spirits was the very worst kind of bad luck, spoken even in jest. But they stuck, still, with splendid credit to the K. A. R. training, to their posts.

"Listen, O three who are nearly dead!" boomed King's voice. "Who am I? Am I not known in the land? What are the tales that men tell of me? Are they not many?"

What he wanted to draw from them was more ammunition for his thunder. To implant a new idea into the African mind takes time. King's simple plan was to find out what these men were predisposed to hear about his powers, and he could then beautifully enlarge upon the theme. Almost the first thing he drew was splendid material.

"Ow, the tales are many, *Bwana.* That you are associate with the greatest of the witch doctors. The tales tell that you know the witchcraft of the beasts; that you are a lord of lions—"

King leaped at that suggestion. The werewolf superstition is current throughout all Africa. Every native knows that certain sorcerers can either turn themselves into various beasts or can project their spirits into beasts to carry out their nefarious purposes. Upon this theory the well known Leopard Society of the West Coast is built.

"Good," chanted the white man. "Lord of lions I am. Many of my dead have I sent into the bodies of lions and of leopards and of hyenas; and at night they prowl in the outer dark. Many ghost lions serve me. What if I summon such a ghost to open this door?"

A PROPHET or a seer is in most cases an alert individual who can extract information from his public, and is quick witted enough to apply such individual information to probable future events. The more shrewdly, or luckily, he manages to fit in his cryptic sayings with the events that follow, the more marvelous a prophet he is. Working along this line, King was a miraculous prophet.

The expected moon began, as yet below the horizon, to flood the *veld* with a cold gray glow. Shadows loomed out where only blackness had been before. With the rising, the customary thin wind began to whisper in the acacia tops. Against the paling sky a fringe of upthrust shale outcrop made a ragged skyline.

Conditions were perfect. Time was right; and, such being the case, a perfectly natural thing happened. From the rock shelters of the low hills came a sound; a low booming drone that filled the air and rose to a deep, aspirated cough. It was repeated four times, rising to a full throated roar of warning and defiance; and then it died away in a series of shorter coughs and grunts.

Simba was out to the hunt.

There is probably no sound more fearsome than the roar of a lion out in the open. There is a vast, all-encompassing vibration about it that impinges upon the nerves with awesome effect. Location is difficult to determine. The menace may be anywhere. The resultant nervous confusion is, of course, just what nature intended.

Even a hardened old-timer, encamped in a strong thorn *boma*, can not hear that deep, vibrant rumble in the distance without a tightening of the skin. For a lion can scent meat an amazing distance away; and if he is hungry enough he may well jump over the thorn fence, make one devasting rush at the first meat he sees—goat or pack burro or man—and jump out again with his prey.

Out in the open, with no shelter at all, the voice of the Lord Simba is a shattering thing for the hardiest nerves. King hopped with excitement.

"Ho-ho," he chanted. "He comes. Hear the voice of my servant whom I have summoned, O three who sit in the open dark. He comes on feet that make no sound. He sees from out the dark where he can not be seen. He springs from the black shadow; he slays and he is gone. Wait for him, O three who sit without fire."

Aside entirely from the ghost theory, there was deadly truth in every word that King spoke; and no man knew it better than those Africans who had been born and brought up under the perpetual menace of Simba. Rifles they had, of course. But not the hardest big game hunter in all Africa, armed with a heavy gun and the most modern luminous sights, will venture to sit out on the ground for lion at night. A platform built high in a tree is the only perch in such conditions.

A deep booming roar sounded out of the imminent dark, apparently almost upon them. Not even the most autocratic martinet officer could have blamed those poor devils of soldiers for their instant desertion of their posts.

With gabbling yelps, they fled. Blundering into things, stumbling, staggering on, yelling in agony as they crashed into thorny mimosa scrub. Yelling, in fact, all the time. Trees were in their confused minds; tall trees where even ghost lions could not spring. But above all, trees far away; trees where they would have at least a fraction of time to feel out and climb.

King sped their parting with joyous jeers and shouted details about the ghosts that he was sending after them. Their blundering passage through the bush faded away into the night; finally even the last of their yells died away. The dead stillness of dry season Africa, when insects are not in evidence, took the place of all the turmoil.

King listened. He held his breath and listened. He waited for the faintest possible crack of twig, for a shuffle of sand, for a padded footfall. There was nothing. It was hardly possible that the beast had not winded all that aggregation of sweating meat. Was it possible that all that demoniac yelling had, as sometimes happens with that inexplicable creature, frightened him away? King wondered; and his mind swiftly grappled with plans accordingly.

AND then, with a suddenness that made even King jump, it came. Not a twig had snapped, not a footfall had sounded. But, right up against the wooden poles of the trap, a long snuffle of indrawn breath.

King whirled round. Almost against his hip it had been. His heart was up in the back of his palate. It was an effort to swallow it and to force himself to calm confidence. He would have to be wary. He was safe enough for the present. If a lion could not get out of that trap, it certainly could not get in. What called for caution was to be sure that no openings between the stout wooden bars were wide enough to let a great yellow paw through. That was a matter to be ascertained without loss of time.

King struck one of his matches to make a quick survey. Green eyes, not three feet from his own, instantly glared in the light. The beast coughed a startled *wroof!* and sprang back. Fire, sudden flame, is the only thing that really frightens any of the great felines. The steady glow of a dying camp-fire will cause long hesitation; but its very steadiness, unaccompanied by any violent action, will permit a return of hungry confidence.

King grunted a short laugh at the great beast's ungainly backward leap. The situation had its ironies, he thought. He, Kingi *Bwana,* reputed down at Nairobi as a lion slayer, reputed among the natives as a witch lord of lions, who had devised many methods of getting at lions in their own fastnesses, boxed up like a mouse in a cage while a lion was devising methods of getting at him.

It could not succeed, of course, and eventually it would get tired of clawing long strips of bark out of the bars and its hunger would cause it to hunt up a less difficult meal. In the meanwhile there was nothing to do but wait.

King laid himself on the floor flat on his belly to kick his heels in patience. He would need plenty, he knew, for the patience of a cat may be well nigh inexhaustible. It worried him—on account of that rising moon.

There was one space between the bars wide enough for a devastating paw. King lay just out of reach of this, his feet against the trap door, and spat in disgust. He fished one of his damp cheroots out of the oilskin case and with difficulty lighted it. Smoking would possibly help his wits to work. That moon—he did not like it a bit. It would come up blazing like a street lamp, lighting up the *veld* so that one could read print by it. Gone would be the eery blackness of night, gone the dense shadows. Even the thick darknesses under the trees would melt to grayness in which bulks of moving shadow could be seen.

And then those guards—damn' them—they might bolster up each other's courage to return. It is the ghost haunted dark that so terrifies the soul of the African; the blackness out of which unseen and grotesquely imagined horror can leap. With glaring moonlight much of the terror of the night would vanish. These men were plucky enough; they were no naked savages, but well drilled soldiers of the K. A. R. It was barely possible that the three of them together, with their rifles, might take chances with a lion where they could see him.

The brute just now was snuffling at a thin crack in the hardwood of the door. King, with his knowledge of its habits, knew that its nose was right up against the wood, breathing in every scent that the wind carried; for that was exactly its direction. In weary disgust he softly rolled over on his back, drew up both feet and kicked heavily against the door.

The lion let out a short roar, sprang back ten feet and growled savagely. King grinned his satisfaction. He had hoped that there would be enough play in the door for his sudden kick to impart a nasty jar to that most sensitive part of any cat—its nose.

His mind returned to a contemplation of his private colored problem. He did not know to what extent he had managed to implant the idea of a lion obsessed by the spirit of a slain man. That was an all important factor. He knew that, should the men's training once suffice to overcome their material fears, his hope of exercising his skulduggery of the night would be considerably reduced.

Not a little bit did he like that rising moon.

A great paw slipped through the space between the bars and raked a wide arc in front of his face. Though he was safely out of reach, he automatically jerked his head back. Then he swore.

"Hell, I must be getting nervous in this damn' den. I'll have to watch that."

The taloned paw, having once found the

space, came in again and raked up clods of dead grass in patient hope. King watched it sulkily. An impish thought came to him and he chuckled. Quickly he stretched out a long arm and ground the glowing butt of his cigar well into the reaching paw.

With a howl unworthy of the king of beasts the paw was snatched back; and the language of that lion was that of a hundred backyard toms with the deep added note of savagery.

SUBCONSCIOUSLY King collected the grass tufts that the beast had clawed up; and following that train of thought he set to pulling up more of the dead grass within the trap and to peeling long strips of bark from the poles. His mind was toying with the idea of setting fire to his cage. But it would have to be the door end, for the wind was blowing freshly through the farther end. The heavy construction of the door and grooves would take a long time to burn. And that moon, the arbiter of tides, granted extra time to no man.

The lion was snuffling round the door again, where the wind blew the scent strongest. King could hear its great paw raking along the sill. He could imagine clearly the picture of an overgrown cat with hooked claws feeling out a crack under a wainscot where the scent of mouse lingered.

All at once the scratching stopped. A claw had caught upon something. The door rattled; and then—King gulped his heart back—the door lifted an inch. His feet against the wood, he had unmistakably felt it. Like a mink he scuttled round in his narrow prison and squatted to face this new problem, his two feet pressed hard against the lower edge of the door.

This thing required consideration. He pictured the construction. Inside the trap—he could feel along the edge—the door dropped behind a hardwood sill, with a good overlap. There was no chink or bottom edge under which anything could hook a claw. Outside, of course, the reverse held good. There was no need of a double sill to prevent anything from that side; it rested simply upon a log. Plenty of opportunity there for a claw, or a hand for that matter, to get a purchase.

And if once, why not again? Everybody knows the persistence of a cat; how it will try the same thing again and over again as soon as it has once learned that some advantage may accrue to it through its action. This overgrown cat was picking with a tentative claw at the sill once more.

King felt that he could apply sufficient force with his two feet pressed hard against the door to prevent any sudden heaving wide of the portal; so no great worry assailed him. But there was a thought in that thing; a thought with possibilities.

The only thing that had made King's prison a prison was the fact that he had no means of lifting that heavy door just the few inches sufficient to let him hook his fingers beneath the lower edge. But if, now, some obliging lion would give him that few first inches of lift— Yes, possibilities were there.

The thing would be no blithe game of tag at any time. Danger, swift and sudden, lurked at the edges of the thought and all around it. There would be no tiny margin of room for a misplay. But—King gritted his teeth—he could never, under any circumstances, let that Sanford man come back and find him still caught like a rat in a trap.

With decision and the glimmerings of a plan a hard grin crept over King's face. Keeping his feet solidly against the door, he lay back and felt with his arms stretched above his head. Somewhere up there was the arrangement of slats that formed the trap fall upon which a beast must step in order to release the catch of the door. King's hands found it, and after some twisting wrenched it loose. He needed one of those slats for his plan. Cautiously he removed his feet from the door, every muscle tense, ready for instant action.

"Now then, my good friend Simba," he

said, "give us a lift on that door. Not too hard now, just a little one."

The lion was scrabbling industriously at the sill. Presently a claw found purchase. The door shook and rattled upward. But King in his anxiety applied foot brakes too soon. The upthrust stopped and the door dropped again.

"Huh, getting to be a nervous fool," King grumbled to himself. He relighted his cigar and puffed evenly at it to prove his steadiness. "Now then, brother worker, how about another lift there?"

The lion was doing its persistent best to oblige. In a few seconds the door rose several inches, high enough to clear the level of the inner sill.

"Good!"

Instantly King thrust a slat under the door to prevent it from falling behind again, and then pressed his feet hard against it. The crack below the edge was larger than necessary. Four taloned toes came through and worked along the edge. King hit at them with another slat. They were snatched back. The door fell down upon the restraining slat, and King applied the brakes.

The first and most difficult move toward his liberation had been successfully accomplished. He now had a clearance of a good inch below the door. He could get his fingers under it and heave it up any time he wished. There remained only the problem of the jailer outside.

An insurmountable problem, it would seem, depending entirely upon the patience of the prowling lion. But King knew things about lions—what they were likely to do, or not to do.

Down in Nairobi that other hunter had said, "Kingi *Bwana* knows how a lion thinks." So there was a definite plan working in King's mind.

THE MOON was sending long shadows from the acacia stems, and King could see the big brute now as it padded back and forth, grumbling to itself between attempts on the door. He watched it critically; for much of his reckless plan would depend upon the degree of its hunger, its temper and so on.

"Hm! Quite a heavy whiskered old papa. That's not so bad. And not any too starved looking. That's better. Must be plenty of small *bok* around here for them. Thank Pete there's no female around with him, so he won't want to show off."

The prowl ceased and the tentative claws scratched along the door again. King felt out a narrowed sliver of split slat and jammed it between door and groove as a wedge.

"Softly, softly," he murmured. "I'm not ready yet, old boy. But I guess we'll be able to deal with you all right."

The plan was desperate enough; but King, too, thinking of the possible return of the three soldiers and Sanford's triumph, had worked himself up to a pitch of desperation. What his plan would need was steel nerve; and with plenty of that there was a reasonable chance that it would work. Nerve, King had more than enough; and he had seen something not dissimilar to his plan work with astonishing results once before.

He whistled tunelessly through his teeth as he set about making his preparations. He needed some slivers of wood. He had those from the slat arrangement that he had torn up. Grass, dry grass, was a necessity. That, too, was in sufficient quantity for his need; and the rope fiber furnished all else that was necessary for a good torch.

With wooden slats as a stiffening core he built up a torch of grass and rope fiber. Particularly of well shredded, grease heavy rope. Especial care did he devote to the business end of his flambeau. He wanted something that would light easily and would burn fast and brilliantly. A regular mop of fluffed out rope he built round the end.

The thin whistle broke out again as he surveyed his handiwork. It was good. Such a torch would blaze brilliantly with no danger of being blown out by the wind at the most urgent moment when darkness would mean swift death.

Everything was ready for the desperate dash except:

"Wouldn't hurt to have the handle a bit longer," King muttered. "He's likely to take a swipe at it in his fright; and sometimes they have a phenomenal reach."

Methodically he lashed another slat to its length; and then he had a mop with a handle nearly four feet in length.

"Good," King commented, feeling the strength of his torch. "Now for the devil or a clear getaway. Where are those darn' matches?"

Simba was facing directly toward the door, a few feet back, sniffing uneasily at the acrid sulphur fumes that the wind carried to him.

Upon the next move it would make when King sprang his plan, would depend whether the American would be alive five minutes later. Everybody has seen the lightning suddenness of tooth and claw with which a cat pounces upon a mouse let out of a trap. Well, a lion can move just as quickly.

Something, some supremely sudden thing, would have to be done to prevent that first split second's snatch of tooth and claw. If King's judgment of lion psychology was sound, if he really knew what a lion would think, his plan would give him that moment's grace. Of the rest he was sure. He had seen it happen before. Nothing was to be gained by waiting. With hard set lips he crouched over his torch like a runner at the mark and applied the match. The next moment he jerked his head back with a startled ejaculation.

The mop of greasy rope flared up almost like celluloid. This was the supreme moment. Immediately or not at all. King tore the restraining wedge out of the groove, hooked his strong fingers under the door, heaved it high, thrust his blazing mop before him and dashed out, yelling like a devil escaped from the fiery pit.

The lion was astoundedly taken aback. It woofed once and crouched back on its tail, startled out of all normal action by the crashing suddenness of the move, blinking its sensitive eyes at the blaze. This moment of inertia was what King had counted on. That instant's hesitation was all that he needed. Yelling still with elation and anticipated triumph, he plunged his blazing mop straight into the startled lion's face.

The great beast fell back, shaking its head to escape the scorching flame. But, at arm's length, King held his torch and pushed it home. For no more than a second, of course; but the second was enough.

Blinded by the sudden glare as much as by the blazing mass in its eyes, badly burned about the face, with its mane on fire, the lion yowled in terrified anguish, plunged aside from the thrust of that desperately determined torch, and with great scrambling bounds rushed away into the streaky moonlight and in a second had blended soundlessly into the farther shadows.

With a final hoarse scream of triumph King turned and ran like a bush *bok* in the opposite direction. Escape out of the imminent jaws of sudden death was his by virtue of his supreme nerve and the surprise of his attack. But the lion might very well come back as soon as his rage should overcome his temporary fear of the fire. King, therefore, clung to his torch as he ran. Its light would serve to give hesitant reminder to the lion as long as it should burn, and the last of its gleams would help him to find a good tree for himself. Not even Kingi *Bwana* cared to wander unarmed on foot through lion country at night, despite an arc light moon.

It was not till he was securely perched in a tall acacia that he fished another wet cigar from his pocket and laughed.

"Now, Br'er Sanford," he chuckled with grim intent. "Now let's see if I can't show you something—you an' your gang of filthy gorillas who laid their paws on me."

For a long time he puffed heavy smoke and busied himself with his thoughts. Once he chuckled again.

"Ho-ho! Bet those three coons 'll have a wholesome surprise."

They did. Afterward when they came fearfully to the trap they saw the great tracks of the lion; they saw the claw marks along the bottom of the door. The door remained whole but the man was gone. They covered their mouths in awe.

"*Whai, ahoo,*" they told each other. "Truly that was a *tagati*, a ghost lion that the *Bwana M'kubwa N'kose* summoned to open the door. Mm-mmm, he is a very great witch master."

SANFORD was on forced march once more. Murder, almost, was in his heart. Never before in his official career had so many things gone wrong in so short a time. And for all of them he cursed King. It was King, he swore, who had been somehow or other in evidence when each new failure crowned his most careful efforts. If not in person, in the background. Every time he thought that he had found an opportunity to trap the arch scoundrel Ibrahim, King's name had cropped up. Always his spies reported that that pestilential Yankee was somewhere in the neighborhood. And always Ibrahim had easily evaded him, leaving jeering messages behind.

It was the fact of the insulting messages that had gone further than any other evidence to convince Sanford of the collusion of the two men. He saw King's hand in those messages. No mere half-breed native would ever dare, he was sure, to leave obscene insults behind him; nor would a breed's sense of humor think of such a thing.

In this matter Sanford's perception of Matteo bin Ibrahim's character was as much at fault as many of his other didactic opinions. That was because his experience had been only with the native African mind. He was of that heavy mental type that would require another fifteen years of residence among Arabic peoples to appreciate the subtle sense of derision that actuated Ibrahim.

But Sanford held his views and drew his conclusions according to the judgment of Sanford. According to his conviction there was circumstantial evidence, heaped up and overflowing, to connect the two men together in the beastly business to stop which he had set his whole reputation at stake. Why were they always in the same district together if they were not in collusion? Why did he never hear of a slave cargo about to be run without hearing, too, of King somewhere in the background?

And this last instance crowned his conviction with certitude. He was out to catch Ibrahim. It had been the best opportunity he had ever had. He had taken every possible precaution. Everything had been going right. Nothing had been omitted. And then came the inevitable King.

Through a despicable ruse of treachery he had caught King—he cursed himself as he thought of his personal sense of decency uselessly sacrificed. Supreme luck seemed to have played into his hands in bringing Ibrahim across the river into British territory at Malolo village. He had done everything he knew to take advantage of that luck.

And Ibrahim had left that village an hour before he arrived with his soldiers. The message, this time, transmitted by the mouth of a stupid village headman who could not understand it, was—

"How shall a ruler of monkeys catch a ruler of men?"

Sanford had gnashed his teeth. The underlying inference was apt, devilishly apt. He knew that the slave runner meant to imply that his own intelligence service always contrived to out-maneuver the best spies that the colonial government could procure. And for that he cursed King again. He did not give Bin Ibrahim, Arab, credit for so much capacity for organization; a white man's brain must direct that. He overlooked the Matteo half of Ibrahim's name.

And now news had come to Sanford again, and he was on feverish trek to take his last desperate chance. Desperate, because he was marching deliberately across an international border without due and proper authority. He knew what that meant. He, an official in high position, with an armed force, crossing an unmistakable border—no mere line on a map, but a broad, permanent river.

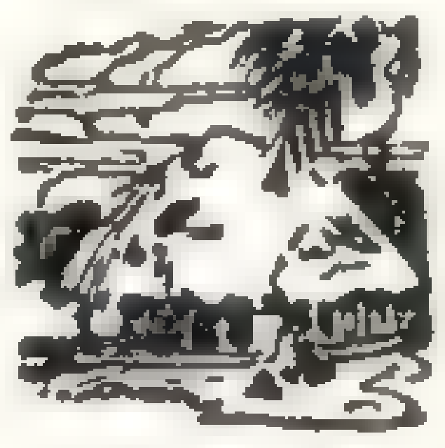
It meant all the grandiloquent terms of diplomacy. "Infringement of sovereign rights." "Armed intervention." "Invasion of friendly territory." It meant that heated orators of the nosier little nations of Europe would rear up on their hind legs before the League of Nations and would demand to know the exact definition of that overworked term, self-determination. It meant, even, that should the outcry be loud enough, diplomacy, that treacherous tool of nations, might find it convenient to make a scapegoat of a high government official.

But Sanford was taking these chances with set teeth and open eyes. He hoped that, possibly, no outcry would be raised. This was a remote and deserted border line; nobody lived there but a few bovine natives in scattered villages; they probably had no very clear idea to whom they belonged. A quick successful raid might be gotten away with.

The word had come that Ibrahim with his slave train had been held up at Dolo by the swollen Doria River. Dolo was two days' march beyond Mandera. At Mandera where the Dukula River flowed into the Dawa the British wedge of territory found its apex. Two days' march farther, the Dawa, forming the border line now between Abyssinia and Italian territory, flowed into the Doria River, a considerable stream that reached the sea through Italian Somaliland.

Ibrahim had easily eluded Sanford in British territory and had passed with his slave chain beyond Mandera. Now the Doria River stayed his course, and Sanford had his choice, either to infringe the sovereign rights of Abyssinia, or to invade the friendly territory of Italian Somaliland. He had chosen Abyssinia as being the less noisy in the council of the League.

Having decided upon the serious step of possible international complications, Sanford's hopes were running high; higher then ever before. All the element of surprise was in his favor this time. Ibrahim, comparatively safe beyond British territory, would never dream that a law abiding official would outrage the very ticklish etiquette of international law. This time, surely, he would be caught off his guard.



DOLO village was built on a little hill, a pleasing little eminence just high enough to be above mosquito level at the junction of the two rivers. A friendly dry *donga* debouched into the Dawa River at the very foot of the hill; an ideal road for a surprise. So along this *donga* panted Sanford's little column. He could not make it a night attack this time for the simple reason that he could not get there soon enough; and sit and wait for the next night he dared not for fear that the Doria River might go down as suddenly as it had risen. But what matter? If it were going to be a real surprise daylight would serve as well as dark; better in fact, since a wily fugitive could less easily escape.

At the foot of the hill Sanford halted his raiders. A wary scout was sent up to observe and report upon the conditions. He returned with the thrilling news that this time the luck had held. Everything was quiet; nobody seemed to be on the watch; nothing was suspected. And, within the thorn *boma*, huddled some hundred and fifty men and women. Not in chain lines, it was true, but unmistakably slaves.

Sanford's elation was a prayer. At last he had the man. There was no possibility of escape. Quickly he gave orders to the sergeant to divide up his men into groups of five and to surround the *boma*. Fifteen minutes would be allowed for the farthest group to get to their positions; and then Sanford himself with ten men would rush the one and only gate in the thorn fence and hold it.

The rest would be the simple matter of routing skulking fugitives out of the huts. There was no fear that Ibrahim would show fight. He had not half as many men as Sanford and he would see in a second that he was outnumbered.

Those were the most pleasurable fifteen

minutes of Sanford's life. At last the luck had turned his way. His raid had been swift and secret. No wandering Abyssinian chiefling had been encountered. There would be no injured howl before the League. Matteo bin Ibrahim's race was run; and there was no comeback.

The single drawback to those fifteen minutes was their interminable slowness in passing. But pass they did. Sanford looked his ten men over. They were ready and eager.

"Magazines all loaded?" he demanded. "All right. No noise now. Forward."

He led the scramble out of the *donga* and then marshaled his men. An easy slope of about two hundred yards lay between them and the gate of the *boma*. There was even a fair amount of mimosa scrub cover. They might steal a hundred yards before being seen. Sanford noted with satisfaction that the thorn fence was high and strong. That was good; nobody would be able to escape. Everything was perfect.

Everything continued to be perfect. The hundred yards were gained without alarm. At the edge of the clearing Sanford gave the order to double; and then at last, as the little force broke into the open, a confused gabble began to rise from within the enclosure. But what did that matter now? They were upon it. Nobody could escape.

The gate stood invitingly, almost suspiciously, open. That is to say, the thorn bushes that were dragged into the opening at night, lay to one side. Everything was so quiet, so orderly, that a fleeting suspicion did, for a moment, check at Sanford's heart. But how needless! There were the slaves, a herd of a hundred and fifty of them. And Ibrahim, of course, would never leave his whole profits of half a year and run off. Not without a vast confusion left behind. Here everything was quiet and as orderly as an African camp may conceivably be. At the gate Sanford halted.

"Five men hold the gate," he ordered. "Nobody may pass. The other five with me. Forward."

Directly facing the *boma* gate was the biggest of the round mud plastered huts—the headman's. Here, obviously, would be where Ibrahim had quartered himself. In the background, staring like bewildered sheep from among the other huts, crowded the unsavory mass of the slaves, dotted here and there by the broad palm straw hats of the villagers. The central hut would be the first object of search.

SANFORD had just selected his gate guard and was stepping forward with the others when a man suddenly stood in the doorway of the hut. Not Ibrahim; but a white man. Long, lean and hard, with an easy grin of confidence on his face. Sanford's heart almost stopped beating and he stood frozen.

"'Lo, Dip'ty *Bwana*," the white man greeted with maddening coolness. "I thought you'd get here earlier. You travel kinda slow with your army."

Insanity burned for a moment in Sanford's mind. His whole plan had crashed. His high hopes of success, his foolish confidence in the prevailing quietness. Everything had been wiped clean once again by the simple appearance of that diabolic man.

Insanity gripped him for a moment, then slowly ebbed to give place to a rising wave of apoplexy. Sanford's whole upper body swelled with forced blood and his limbs shook. Two of his soldiers supported him. That congestion, too, slowly ebbed and thoughts began to sear Sanford's brain.

Why should this man's presence destroy the structure of so many weeks' building? What was it that this man had to enable him to dominate every situation? Why, after all, could he not be treated as any other man? What backing did he have, here in this remote village? Sanford had made him prisoner once—he had escaped in some miraculous manner—but Sanford still had his little army. Why should he not simply be bold and arrest this Yankee again?

But this time King stood in a different

position from that of their last meeting. He was taking nothing on trust. A heavy automatic pistol weighted down a holster and another one showed its square black handle above the belt of his khaki breeches. Sanford had had time to read that letter of Consul Peterson's in which the young man, amid his blunderings and suspicions, had described how this man could use those pistols.

King shook his head at Sanford, and his grin was very hard.

"Nope, it won't do this time, Dip'ty *Bwana.* I'm heeled. I try never to fall into the same hole twice."

The hard grin widened a little.

"And I'll tell you some more what you're thinking right now. You've got ten men, and you make eleven. All trained to a fine sense of duty. You give the word, and maybe they'll rush me. *Maybe.* P'raps you'd like to try. I'll tell you the truth. I've got no more'n twelve shots here—I never load more'n six to each magazine 'cause they weaken the springs. I'll make a bet with you on how many of your gorillas get their paws on me this time."

Sanford made no move. He gave no order to his men. He did not know how they would respond, and the cool admission of King about his twelve cartridges betokened an awful confidence. King continued slowly:

"Tell you what I'll do. I don't mind making it even. Eleven all. I don't like the way that man is fingering his rifle."

He snatched the pistol from his belt and fired. The man indicated screamed and jumped high in the air. Then to his own terrified surprise he found that he did not crumple to the ground, but stood, still on his own feet. Only his rifle had been jerked from his grasp and lay on the ground a little behind him.

It was theatrical. It was cheaply motion-picturesque. But King shrewdly knew the value on the mob mind of a pistol shot, sudden and accurate. He was ready now to take command.

"Now then, men," he said sharply. "'Tenshun there! All right. Now, by threes from the right, ten paces forward and stack your rifles. Hop to it there!"

And forthwith, quietly, without hesitation or protest, the command of the little army passed from the deputy commissioner of the Northern Territory, Kenya Colony, over to King, hunter and suspect slave runner. King pointed with his gun along the line; and the men, by threes, stepped forward and made the regulation tripods of their weapons.

"Good. Now then, beat it, all of you. Dismiss. Get to sudden hell outa here." King turned to the humiliated commander.

"Some of my boys will be attending to the rest of your crowd outside; so there won't be any relief expedish all of a sudden. I don't suppose you've got any hidden gun, besides that revolver at your belt, have you, Sanford? No? Well, I'll take your word, if you like, that you won't attempt to pull that one?"

Sanford was still dazed at the smashing swiftness of happenings; but his anger flared up at last at this mark of supreme contempt. Furious words choked in his throat. But King held up his hand to stop.

"Keep your shirt, Dip'ty *Bwana.* This time it's no offense. Officer and gentleman stuff. You pulled a dirty deal on me last time; but I guess I've got that figured out. Your white man word goes."

Sanford's daze became an incredulous wonder. In his silence King continued:

"Now that we're going to have no more armed intervention, we can sit and hold that powwow that I came to propose last time. But first, I guess you want to see my friend Ibrahim. That's what you came for, isn't it? Come right along, brother, an' I'll introduce you."

King led the way round to the back of the big hut. Sanford, following him, could not prevent the thought of the revolver at his belt from coming into his mind. But Sanford, after all, was a white man.

KING stopped at a smaller hut outside of which one of his camp boys stood.

"Run fetch fire," he told him.

In a very few seconds the boy came with a lighted torch. King motioned the boy in first and Sanford after him. Sanford saw five dim forms on the floor. From the sameness of their positions it was obvious that all of them were securely bound.

"The third one from the left is Ibrahim," said King. "You never met him before, did you? Boy, bring that fire nearer. So."

A long silence passed while the two enemies looked into each other's faces with who knows what thoughts in their hearts.

Then Ibrahim opened his mouth. Slowly and with the viciousness of a trapped snake the soul searing words hissed forth.

"*Yeth-abba-tu?* Where is your father, Commissioner-man with the head of a wild ass? *Exiabiher le Diabol yisth!* May God deliver you to the devil that his lesser imps may put the ultimate shame upon you. May the creeping sickness rot your bloated white hide—"

That and much more did Ibrahim the slave runner have to say to Deputy Commissioner Sanford. Some of it was in Amharic, the bitterly descriptive language of Abyssinia; and when the limitations of that one failed him, Ibrahim turned to his native Arabic, to the vituperative force of which there are no limitations.

Deputy Commissioner Sanford understood no word of any of it. His exalted position placed him far above any necessity of understanding native languages. Interpreters were always at his elbow for all linguistic purposes—and sometimes they interpreted what was told to them with quite some accuracy. Kingi *Bwana* listened to all of it with a stone face. But the torch boy, after a period of awe that such things should be addressed to a deputy commissioner, who was very close to God, rolled his eyes and gave vent to explosive gurgling noises in his throat. King swiftly kicked at him and he dropped the torch with a howl and fled.

King struck matches and showed Sanford out of the hut.

"Curious," was all his comment. "He said a lot more to you than he did to me when I first caught him. Queer mentality, these Arabs— Clever looking devil, isn't he, though? You can understand how he got away with it for so long."

Sanford was silent. Too many violent adjustments were going on in his mind to permit of speech. Sanford's reasoning was not of the swift and intuitive kind. Ponderously official, rather, was the grind of his machinery of thought. Here he was suddenly faced with things new to him, vast things that upset the whole structure of his preconceived ideas. Ibrahim! King! What and who were they? Ibrahim, slave runner, of course—he had been trying to catch him for two years. But King—what, who?

Kingi *Bwana*, slave runner. The words had been synonymous in his mind for nearly all of the two years. But what the devil, then, was Ibrahim doing bound hand and foot in a hut while King coolly dominated the situation—Commissioner Sanford included—with gallingly magnanimous *bonhommie?* In bewildered silence he followed King out to the long deferred powwow, the powwow forced upon him this time, to which he had to sit and listen.

During that talk he learned many things. Very many things that he had not understood for two years. Things that slowly began to grow clear to him, as there began, much more slowly, to grow the realization that nearly all of his misunderstanding had been born out of his own pompous fault. But that realization was to develop to its full extent only later and to his own very great good. The realization that smashed home to him to the exclusion of everything else just then was that Kingi *Bwana* and slave runner were not synonyms.

King pointed an accusing brown finger at him.

"One of your assumptions, Dip'ty *Bwana*, that I couldn't ever understand, was why'n hell you jumped to the fool conclusion that I was in cahoots with this Ibrahim thing. What did you ever come across that I'd ever done to make you think I was playing in with him?"

Sanford, forced suddenly to give thought to the question, found the answer not easy to give. There had been no action, no one of the many rumors about King, that could ever have been translated to place him as a ruthless exploiter of human flesh on the hoof. Sanford's only reason was true to the official type.

"Well, the news always seemed to be that wherever Ibrahim was being particularly active you were invariably in the background somewhere; you were always in the immediate neighborhood."

"And how about yourself?" King snapped. "Weren't you always in the immediate neighborhood for the last two years? Always just too late—like myself?"

"But—" defended Sanford with immediate justification—"I was on official business. I was deputed by my government to catch him."

"And of course it couldn't occur to you," King shot in, "that anybody else might be deputed by any other government than your virtuous own to catch the same man?"

"Well—" began Sanford once more. But King interrupted in quick indignation.

"Shucks, you've got no excuse. I know what you've been broadcasting for two years—my own little information service hasn't been entirely dumb, as maybe you've found occasion to notice. I know that you've been telling the world that the whole *shauri* has been up to *your* government; that nobody else on any side of the border gave a hang about the business. You've preached that up and down the land as though you were your whole propaganda bureau."

"But," Sanford was able to interject this time, "we could never get any cooperation—"

King interrupted him again with force and with the conviction born of experience.

"Ah, now you've said it yourself. You're darn' right you could get no cooperation. Let me tell you—now don't get all het up about this, Mr. Commissioner; I'm not criticizing, I'm stating fact. Nobody in all history has ever been able to cooperate with your government. Your people have just got to do things your own way. It may be a heap better than the other fellow's way—I'm not criticizing it, as I told you—but it's *your* way, and that's how you're going to do it. And I'll admit right here that pretty often it's done damn' well.

"If I had tried to get together with your big guns down at Nairobi I'd have been tied up with a hundred miles of red tape and I'd have needed a mule load of printed forms and a typist-stenographer to keep pace with things. And I like to do things my own way, sometimes. And where I come from it's results that count."

SANFORD'S innate hereditary courtesy, formal though it was and pompous, came to the front. Chagrin at his own failure as against the other's signal success overwhelmed him; but he was able to say, as though to a winning opponent in a sporting event:

"And the results of your method, sir, have been splendid. Permit me to say, very splendid indeed, and to congratulate you."

King's indignation melted from him, and he just had to laugh. He rocked back and laughed, while the other wondered anew at the queer manifestations of Yankee humor. King chuckled till Sanford was forced to interrupt him with the question—

"Well — er — how did you manage eventually to catch the cunning beast?"

King grinned widely.

"Huh, surprised him. He, too, swallowed the story that a lion had got me in the end."

Sanford grimaced. The recollection of how his own information department had been hoodwinked was unpleasant. He changed the subject.

"What are you going to do with him now?"

"I want to discuss that with you, some. Let's figure that *we* caught him. I couldn't have got him if you hadn't been so hot on his trail on your side of the border. Suppose now that I turned him over to you. What would you do with him?"

Sanford clutched at the hope.

"Why, I would take him down to Nairobi and turn him over to the executive authorities."

"Hm-m," grunted King. "And then?"

"Why, then he would be tried; and with the evidence we have, he would most certainly be convicted."

"Yeah, and then?"

"Well, he would be sent away, probably to the Breakwater, on hard labor for the extreme limit that the law allows."

"And that would be—"

"Why, that would depend upon the judge, to a certain extent; but I should say it would be at least four or five years."

King slammed his fist down upon the fragile camp table so that a thin leg gave way and it crumpled under the blow.

"Then you don't get him!" he shouted. "Five years is the extreme limit that the law of your soft headed paternal colonial administration allows for all that Mister Matteo bin Ibrahim has been doing for the past ten years. It's not good enough. He'll be sure to come right back here and open up his old business; and I don't know about how smart you think you are, but I know he's smart enough so I'll never catch him again. He's thirty-two years old now. Figure that he may live to his three score and ten. He's been running an average of three hundred slaves a year—and if you want to see how he treats 'em, just look over that bunch outside.

"Forty per cent. of his cargoes die in the Somali Desert between here and the shipping depot at Illigh. Good old style method. When they can't be beaten to walk any more they're cut loose and left; and there's nobody bringing them any iced tea. And if you don't know it, I'll tell you how the buzzards start on them before they're dead. I could tell you a heap more things, too, about our Ibrahim's racket. Three hundred humans has been his yearly average. Figure it out for yourself, how much it'll come to in the course of his remaining years of active business. No, sir. It's not good enough."

Sanford was appalled at the thought of all that potential misery; and he knew, as did every other official, what weak kneed penalties were handed down by judges restricted by the cumbersome limitations of their law.

"Well, what do you propose to do?" he asked King.

"I'll tell you," said King firmly. "I'll give you the slaves. And if you'll take my advice, you'll herd 'em all the way down to Kimberley where the mining syndicates are in need of labor and will pay for it; otherwise they'll all come trooping back here like lonesome monkeys. And I'll give you the other four men; they're underlings of Matteo's, an' maybe you can get them their five years' hard apiece.

"But Matteo bin Ibrahim's *mine.* The Abyssinian Government wants him worse than just five years of hard labor, because it's Abyssinian subjects he's been dealing in. So I'll take him right back to the central-government in Addis Abeba where they have sound laws about slaves and sounder ones about slave raiding."

"And then?"

"And then," said King firmly, "they will judge him and will give him the extreme limit that the law allows."

"And that will be?"

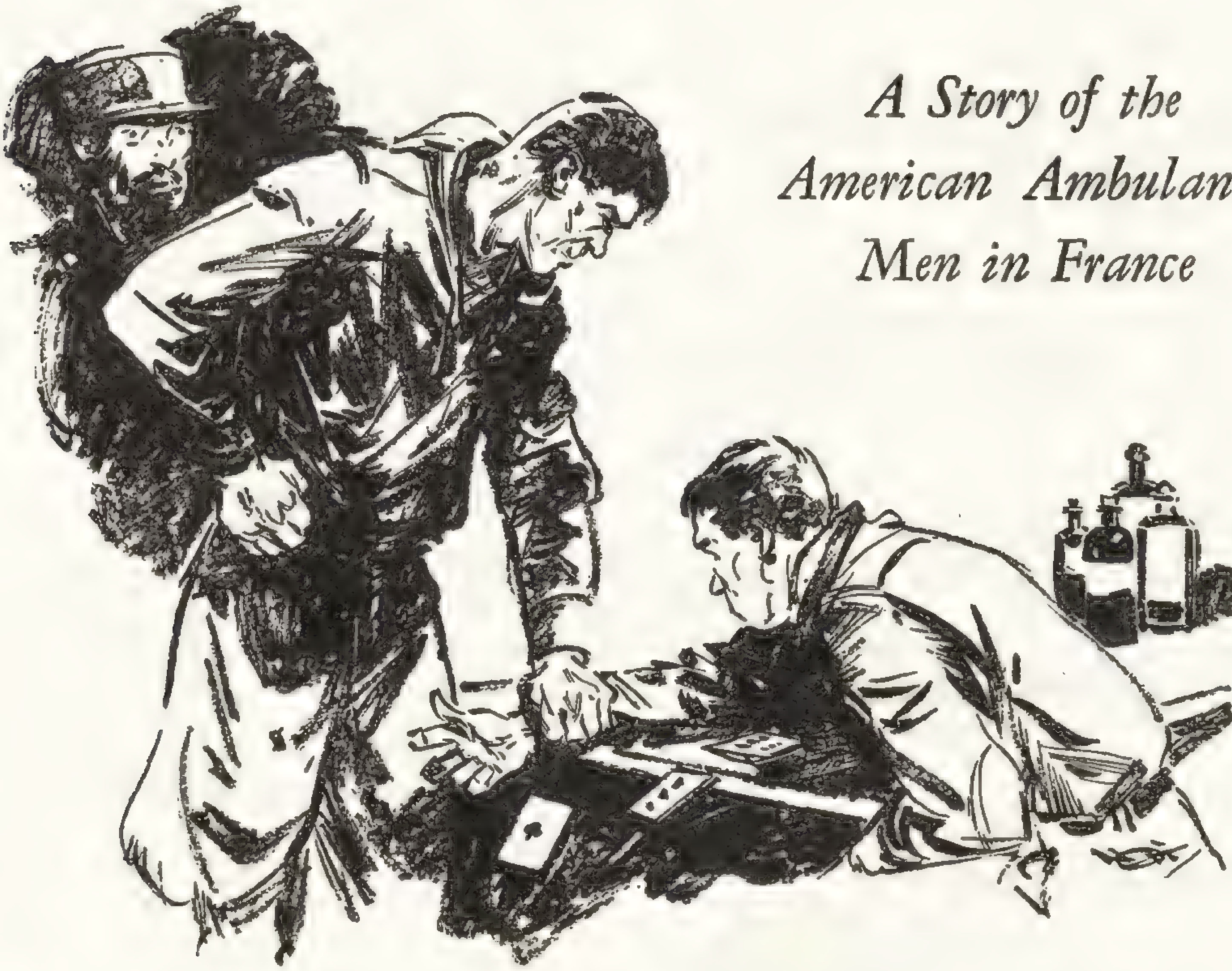
"That will be," said King grimly, "that they will hang Matteo bin Ibrahim from a tree in the center of the marketplace till they are very sure that he won't come back after five years. And may the spirits of his dead attend to his soul."

There was silence. At last—

"I think," said Sanford, "that in this case the Abyssinian way is better than our way."

"A whole hell of a lot," said King. "That's the first thing we've ever agreed upon. Shake."

BARRAGE *by* LARRY BARRETTO



A Story of the American Ambulance Men in France

"IF THE bombardment does not stop by five, one of you will have to go out," said the young French doctor to the American ambulance men who were sitting near the entrance to the cave. "Water we must have and anti-tetanus serum. Especially the serum." He muttered a voluble, throaty curse at the Germans and all their ways and then returned to his wounded.

They, the wounded, looked livid in the half light as they lay on their stretchers without speaking, conserving their strength for the moment when they would be taken from this place. In one corner discarded, bloody bandages had been tossed in a heap and the smell of fresh blood was on the damp air.

A few bearded French stretcher bearers squatted in one corner and looked at the opposite wall with blank eyes. They had nothing to say and no thought save for the unending war. An inarticulate resentment burned in them now for this bombardment which continued hour after hour.

But the Americans attached to this post were audible. In their position by the entrance to the cave they could look across the valley, gray with heaving smoke, where the Germans were pounding Tartiers and the surrounding plain with every gun they could drag into place. They could see the sullen sky which bent down and mingled with the smoke. The landscape through the smoke was brown and sear; every green thing had been withered by the gasses that had poured across the plain.

"I'm damned if I go out into that hell," one of the drivers said. "What's the matter with these Frogs? Does he want to bump us off, or what?"

He was a slim, wiry man with black eyes and nervous hands. His companions called him Rocco, since his last name was unpronounceable to any but a member of the Mediterranean races.

"If we gotta go, we gotta go," Olsen, the other man answered heavily. "You heard him say we're out o' serum an' water; besides which the food is running low." He tightened his belt as if suddenly conscious of his own emptiness.

There was a renewed burst of shelling, and the crashing explosions made hollow rumblings through the cave. Chips of limestone dropped to the floor. Rocco looked up nervously.

"You think it'll cave in?" he asked.

Olsen shook his head.

"There's not a chance. Twenty feet of stone between us and the surface. What makes you so jumpy, Rocco?"

The dark man spat viciously through the entrance.

"How long have we been here?" he demanded.

"Two days an' a night."

"Cripes! Ain't that enough?" Rocco demanded, his voice shriller. "How long do they think human beings can stand this sort of thing? We're flesh an' blood, ain't we?"

Olsen did not see fit to answer this. He had heard somewhere that city bred men stood the strain of war better than those who came from the land where there was always tranquility, but he doubted it. Rocco was a product of city streets. He had been born to the roar of an elevated train and his youth had been spent dodging thunderous trucks. He had grown up in the multifarious clamor of New York, yet he was undoubtedly cracking under two days of bombardment.

Olsen had no doubts about himself. He had lived always in a peaceful town or in the woods, yet the hurricane of fire that swept down on Tartiers left him unmoved. His blue eyes gazed placidly out on the drifting smoke and his arms hung relaxed, but in spite of this there was a difference. Ordinarily the most good natured of mortals, he found himself hating Rocco—in particular for the way he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and for his fretful voice which induced a tightening of nerves that he had not known before. He and Rocco had been casual friends, but now beneath the surface they were enemies.

"How we going to stand it?" Rocco demanded again as if it were in some manner Olsen's fault.

Olsen indicated the wounded with a jerk of his thumb.

"They're standing it," he said.

"They ain't standing it very well," Rocco answered with a certain satisfaction. "Two of 'em died since midnight."

The fair haired man did not answer that. He had volunteered with a couple of the stretcher bearers to scrape shallow graves outside the cave in order that the bodies might be removed from the sight of the wounded, and he remembered with a sinking feeling how like sacks of spilling grain the broken corpses had felt. Rocco had not offered to help.

"An' they're standing it down there," Olsen continued, speaking of the troops below who fought desperately in the smoke, repelling attack after attack.

"To hell with 'em," Rocco snapped. "They're only Frog infantry anyway, an' that's their job."

A long silence followed.

"It is their job," Rocco insisted as if he had been contradicted. "Why don't you say something?" He thought, "The big dummy; he never opens his mug. I'll make him talk."

Olsen stood up.

"I'm going out to look at the cars," he said. "If one of us gotta go back for supplies at five we might as well see they're all right." He disappeared without waiting for an answer.

BUT HE hardly glanced at the ambulances. They had been parked under a ledge of rock where they were safe from direct shelling. Instead, Olsen leaned against the cliff and stared along the road which skirted the valley until it turned abruptly up across the plain. The Germans were determined that during this attack no more troops should be brought up to the assistance of those struggling against them, and their guns were laying down a barrage that spread across the road and fields, tossing huge geysers of earth into the air. For a car or a man on foot to get through that tornado seemed impossible, and Olsen felt his mouth go dry as he thought of attempting it. A piece of shrapnel whined past him and he returned hurriedly to the shelter of the cave.

After the gray light outside it seemed darker than before, and in the few minutes of his absence the wounded appeared to have become more conscious of their pain. They turned uneasily on their stretchers, when they could, and asked questions in hoarse, dry whispers which nobody answered. In the far corner a boy kept crying a name in a high delirious voice and even when one of the stretcher bearers rose heavily and spoke to him he would not be quieted.

It was water that they wanted, Olsen knew. Every canteen in the cave had long since been drained dry. He shivered at the thought of what must be happening to the wounded in the regimental dressing stations below them. The fury of the bombardment had at least spared them that sight, for it was impossible to bring other men to the big cave where there was no longer water, food or medical supplies.

He sat down by Rocco, but this time neither of them spoke. The dark man had buried his head in his hands as if he were sleeping, but Olsen knew by his tense body that he was not asleep. He was trying to shut out the line of gray faces that stretched along the wall, trying not to hear the feeble complaints that came in a continuous mutter from the men. Olsen had an instant of irritation. A hot rage burned up in him so that he wanted to kick Rocco. Why couldn't he face things like a man?

A moment later his anger was gone in remorse. Rocco was shaken from lack of sleep; he was thirsty and probably hungry, too. That was all. His mild eyes troubled, Olsen stared out across the valley where the gray smoke mingled with the gray clouds in dim depression.

When he roused again the French doctor was speaking to him in his precise, cultivated English. He was looking at his wrist watch and his manner was distraught.

"I am sorry," he said, "that it is necessary to send an ambulance out. I would not do it except that you will understand we will lose many wounded during another night without supplies. The boy in the corner is very low. He will die, I think." His shrug expressed not indifference, but helplessness.

Olsen looked once along the shell torn road and then turned to the doctor numbly.

"Here is a list," the doctor was saying. "You will find the supplies at the *triage*. Serum first, then water, bandages also, and I have put down morphine. As soon as dark falls the bearers will be bringing up freshly wounded men and we will need morphine."

"Do you think a car can drive through that?" Olsen asked and pointed to the road.

The young Frenchman's eyes were reddened with weariness; his face was unshaven and he was smeared with dirt and dried blood. He was unutterably tired, but his voice was sympathetic when he answered.

"You can try. I think there is a chance. Yes, a chance. There are moments when the barrage breaks, and with luck— You understand, monsieur, it is only for the wounded that I ask—"

Olsen nodded.

"I understand. One of us will go, *médecin chef*."

He turned to rouse Rocco, but Rocco

had been listening. He was thumbing a pack of greasy cards with which he had been playing solitaire.

"You heard?" Olsen asked. "Who's going back, Rocco? It's five o'clock."

Rocco wet his lips.

"You're going," he said with a confidence that he did not feel. "Didn't you get here first?"

It was a rule of the ambulance service that when two cars were on post together the first to arrive would be the first to leave. Ordinarily this was an advantage.

"Like hell I got here first!" Olsen answered sharply. "We came in with our wheels even. There wasn't an inch difference between 'em."

"Well, I'm not goin'," Rocco said sullenly. "You're a better driver than I am an' you got more chance of getting through."

Olsen's blue eyes became very bright.

"Don't pull that bull on me," he advised. "Didn't you drive a taxi back in the States?"

"Well, I done other things since," Rocco retorted. "When I joined up for this war I was a barber."

Olsen grinned.

"See if you can cut corners as well as you cut hair then."

"Naw," said the dark man, his jaw thrust forward. "I don't hafta. Didn't we come in together? You said we did."

"It don't look too good to me either," Olsen admitted. "All right, Rocco, we'll cut for it. Gimme them cards. Three out o' five an' the high man goes."

He reached for the pack, but the other man's hand was over it.

"The guy who goes out there's goin' to get bumped off," Rocco whispered. "I can't die, Oley. I got too much to live for."

"What you got to live for?" Olsen demanded contemptuously. "So you can go back to barbering or dope peddling or something? What about me? Ain't I got things to live for too? Come on, you yellow rat; take your hands off them cards an' we'll cut."

Rocco picked up the cards and began shuffling them with quick, dextrous fingers. An uneasy smile touched his lips and his eyes slid away from Olsen's angry face.

"All right," he agreed. "Three out o' five, aces low, an' the high man goes."

Olsen cut first and turned up a three of hearts. Rocco cut a king of the same suit. He shuffled and they cut again. Olsen exposed a five of diamonds and Rocco a ten of clubs. The fair haired man began to grin.

"One more an' you're elected," he said.

But the next cut brought Olsen a Jack and Rocco a four spot, and the fourth cut brought a nine of spades to Olsen, a six of spades to Rocco.

"You shot off your mout' too soon," the latter snapped. "We're even."

The first cut of the last shuffle was Olsen's. Both men were bending forward, their eyes intent. With a shout of triumph Olsen turned up a deuce

"Beat that if you can!" he cried.

ROCCO was staring straight at him; his black intense eyes were compelling him to look up. Olsen did look up for an instant and then some instinct, he could not tell what, swept his eyes down to Rocco's right hand. It was reaching for the pack.

With a curse he lunged forward and caught Rocco's wrist. His weight pressing down, he compelled the hand to turn in order that the wrist bone might not snap. An ace of clubs fluttered to the ground.

Red rage flared up into Olsen's eyes and blinded him.

"You palmed it!" he started to say, but the words were choked, jammed back in his throat by the hard impact of Rocco's left fist against his mouth. He reached forward and pulled Rocco to him with a jerk that ripped his blouse open from throat to waist.

Then they fought, without rules and without chivalry, rolling on the floor of the cave, striking blows when they could, but gouging for each other's eyes, clawing for windpipes and biting. The Frenchmen gathered in a circle about them, silent, interested spectators of the Americans who not content with the war outside must fight among themselves. The wounded turned on their stretchers to watch. There was no sound in the cave except the drumming of heels on the hard ground and a breathless grunt when a blow struck a tough body. Outside, the cyclone of fire swept on in a rising roar.

Something happened at last, something so quick that no eyes could see. Only the result was apparent, for Rocco was crawling away on his hands and knees. A Rocco whose face streamed blood and whose breath welled up from his lungs in sobbing gasps. Olsen swayed to his feet and stood over him.

"Get in your car an' drive off, you scum," he said harshly. "You lose!"

Rocco was whispering through bloody lips. Olsen had to bend to hear him.

"I gotta get my mask an' helmet," he was saying. "I can't drive like this."

"I'll give you five minutes to get ready," Olsen answered.

There was a certain grim justice about him and he would not send under fire even a man whom he had caught cheating at cards without the protection that a helmet and gas mask offered.

Rocco got to his feet wearily like a man who has run for miles and stumbled off toward the back of the cave. Olsen sat down again. To his surprise he felt dizzy and there were black spots racing before his eyes. The Frenchmen were moving away slowly, still staring, as if the spectacle were not over. Olsen ignored them. He had an uneasy feeling of the impropriety, almost the indecency, of fighting here at the Front where death threatened them every moment; but his fury against Rocco who cheated had not abated.

In an attempt at indifference he began picking up the soiled cards that lay scattered within his reach. He was thinking bitterly that he had as much to live for as Rocco, and he was glad that chance had managed it so that he would not have to leave the shelter of the cave. One of the cards felt thin in his fingers and he turned it over; but it was not a card. Olsen stared at it curiously. This was a picture of a child—the snapshot of a baby with a fluff of black hair on its round head, and intense black eyes that stared from its solemn face. Rocco's eyes, and Rocco's kid.

"By God, I didn't even know he was married, the louse," Olsen muttered. He continued to look at the picture and the seconds on his watch continued to flash away.

At last he got to his feet and left the cave. The same veil of gray smoke mingled with the gray sky; the same fury of explosions rent the tired air. Across the torn road a barrage was still dropping. Olsen looked once with tightened lips. Then he opened a jackknife and stepped swiftly to the nearest car. He slashed once across the forward tire and heard the pop and rush of air in the greater uproar as the tire collapsed on its rim. That done, he closed the knife and returned to the cave.

Rocco was ready at last. His helmet was pulled low, shading his swollen eyes, and he had rubbed some of the blood from his face. He held out his hand silently for the list of supplies.

"A hunk of shrapnel has punctured one of your tires," Olsen told him. "There ain't time to change, so I'll have to go."

"I'll take your car then," Rocco said dully.

It no longer mattered to him whether he stayed or went. In either case his career in the outfit was done. Olsen would tell the story of the palmed ace; Rocco knew he would. He could see it in the hard blue eyes staring at him. The men with whom he had to live and work would forgive anything—almost anything—but they would not forgive that. It would be unending—the scorn, the humiliations, the contempt. Rocco was done.

"I'll take your car," he repeated.

"Like hell you will; I'll drive my own car," Olsen answered.

He left the cave, cranked his machine and climbed to the seat. The stretcher bearers and the doctor came into the open to see him off. The wounded with parched mouths stared after him hopefully. Rocco could not speak. Suddenly a new hope was rising in his breast. Nothing living could get through that steady, methodical shelling. No man could live who tried it. This was all a crazy experiment of the desperate young doctor. Already Olsen was dead before he started, but Rocco could not see him die. His battered eyes haggard with anxiety, he stared out at the gray storm.

The motor was making a tremendous clatter; it was fading as the car swept along the straight road. Rocco could tell when it was approaching the barrage by the hissing breath of an old stretcher bearer beside him.

"It goes well," said the young doctor with satisfaction. And then there was a gasp, a great sigh.

Rocco wrenched his eyes from the whirling clouds. There was a gray cloud about the ambulance, but it was smoke. When it lifted he could see that the ambulance had been tilted; it lay half on its side, two wheels shattered. In front of it a new shell hole gaped in the churned road.

From the car Olsen crawled, grasped the side of it and pulled himself erect. He ran a few steps, limping, one arm about his face to protect it. Then he stumbled to his knees. He rose again and started off blindly in the direction of the cave, then he pitched forward on the road.

The Frenchmen were milling about in frantic excitement; they were calling expostulation and advice to one another, but it was needless, for no one had really moved. The doctor groaned.

"*C'est le suicide!*" he whispered, and they believed him.

Rocco jammed his helmet more firmly on his head and took a deep breath. Some one caught at his arm, but he shook the man off. Some one else had shouted, but Rocco did not hear. He pulled once impatiently at his swollen eyes so that he could see more clearly and then he began to run.

THE GRAY earth and the gray sky were whirling about him. There was a tremendous roaring sound like the sound of a great sea rising to drag him down. He struggled through it. The road was heaving and trembling beneath his feet. He sped across it untouched.

Olsen was in front of him and he dragged him to his feet. The driver's face was a white blur and his blue eyes had dulled. Rocco did not know whether he was alive or dead, and he dared not stop to learn. With tremendous exertion he bent and pulled the fair haired man across his back. Then, stooping low, with the breath thick in his throat, he stumbled and staggered back over the ground across which a minute before he had flashed on wings.

The Frenchmen were frantic with excitement and they did not understand. These men had fought each other almost to the death, then braving death one had dragged the other back to safety. Running out from the mouth of the cave, they closed about Rocco, lifting the burden from his shoulders and assisting him in with friendly hands. The doctor was already waiting, his sleeves rolled, bandages and instruments laid out on a rubber pad on the packed sand. Rocco did not go back with Olsen. While the breath subsided in his throat he leaned heavily against a wall of the cave.

It was seven o'clock and the doctor was making his report.

"It is not too serious," he said to Rocco. "His ankle bone is shattered and his left shoulder was pierced. He will get well, of course, but now he is in pain. You have repaired your tire?"

Rocco nodded.

"Good," said the doctor. "When the shelling stops, and not before, you will go out with your ambulance and you will take your friend. We will try to move the wounded if possible during the night, but so long as the bombardment—"

His voice died away. The guns had stopped and a strange silence had fallen on the earth. In the valley the smoke was drifting off; one could see that where the grass and trees had not been scorched there was still a tender green. The clouds parted and a feeble sun shone through. It spread and spread until its light penetrated even into the cave, warming the pallid faces of the wounded with a faint glow. Somewhere, far off, defiantly, a bird began to sing. The gray storm had passed.

The stretcher men were bringing Olsen and two others to the waiting ambulance. Rocco stared at him—the slow spoken, fair haired boy with the sleepy, friendly eyes. In the clear evening light it was like discovering an old friend.

"An' I wanted him to croak!" he thought in a sort of shamed wonder.

Olsen was staring back.

"He went out there an' pulled me out o' that hell!" he was saying to himself. "He saved my life."

But he could not put it into words. Instead he fumbled in his pocket, his fingers working awkwardly through the bandages and pulled out something. He held it for a moment and his lips twisted in a grin. A wizened, funny little face—solemn black eyes staring from it. Rocco's eyes—Rocco's kid.

"Here's somethin' you dropped," he said.

Rocco moistened his lips and took the picture, but he said nothing. He was looking down at Olsen, his eyes enormous in their intensity.

"I guess you dropped it while we was playin' that friendly game of cards," Olsen continued.

A bright flush was spreading across Rocco's face, but still he did not speak.

"I said you dropped it," Olsen repeated with emphasis as the bearers raised the stretcher to the car. "During our friendly game."

PRESENT DAY DUELING

By F R. BUCKLEY

THOUGH its practise has been illegal for centuries, dueling is by no means extinct in Europe; I mean formal dueling according to the code developed in France during the eighteenth century. Pistols—muzzle loading, .44 caliber percussion lock weapons firing a round ball—are usually chosen by men; whereas women—who fight more often than any one seems to suspect—invariably use swords.

The combat takes place on a frontier, over which the victor exiles himself, if the affair has a serious ending, until such time as the authorities shall have signified their acceptance of the motor car accident story which usually explains the victim's injuries.

Aside from the occasional publicity hunting mock combats between actors and senators there are combats of varying degrees of intensity—some in which the parties involved wish to exchange shots more or less as a formality; others in which they really desire to kill or be killed. The dueling ritual accommodates itself to either type without other change than the sliding up or down of a small weight on a little clockwork machine; and, barring accidents, results can be guaranteed.

The dueling party consists, beside the principals, of a second for each, a surgeon and a disinterested party to give the signals.

The two seconds examine and load the pistols, using powder, bullets and percussion caps from the same lots, watching each other carefully to see that there is no difference in the loading. They also measure the distance—usually twenty meters—and decide, with the judge in conference, at what speed the metronome shall be set.

The metronome is, of course, the instrument used to beat time for beginners in music. In this case its setting will decide whether the duelists are to bore holes in the atmosphere or in each other. At any speed less than 120, two beats to the second, there is danger that some one will get hurt; 80 is considered murderously slow; whereas if the weight is at 200 or above the field of honor will almost certainly be bloodless.

The metronome started and placed where judge and seconds can clearly hear its *tick-tack*, the principals are placed and instructed by the judge as to the manner in which the signals will be given. The loaded pistols, half cocked, are placed in their hands; they stand sidewise to each other, right arms down, pistols held parallel to the thigh and pointing at the earth. At the command "*Armez*"*!* from the judge, they cock their weapons and return to this same position.

All is now ready, and the judge on a beat of the metronome, says in a tone of authority—

"*Attention!*"

The next command, also on a beat of the metronome, is—

"*Feu!*"

This is followed by the count, exactly on succeeding beats—

"*Un—deux—trois.*"

The duelists may not raise their weapons to aim before the command to fire nor press the trigger after the count of three.

It is therefore obvious that raising the pistol, aiming, and firing must be accomplished during four beats of the metronome; which with the weight at 240, means precisely one second, and nobody hurt.

The bullets usually strike the ground about three feet in front of the firers.

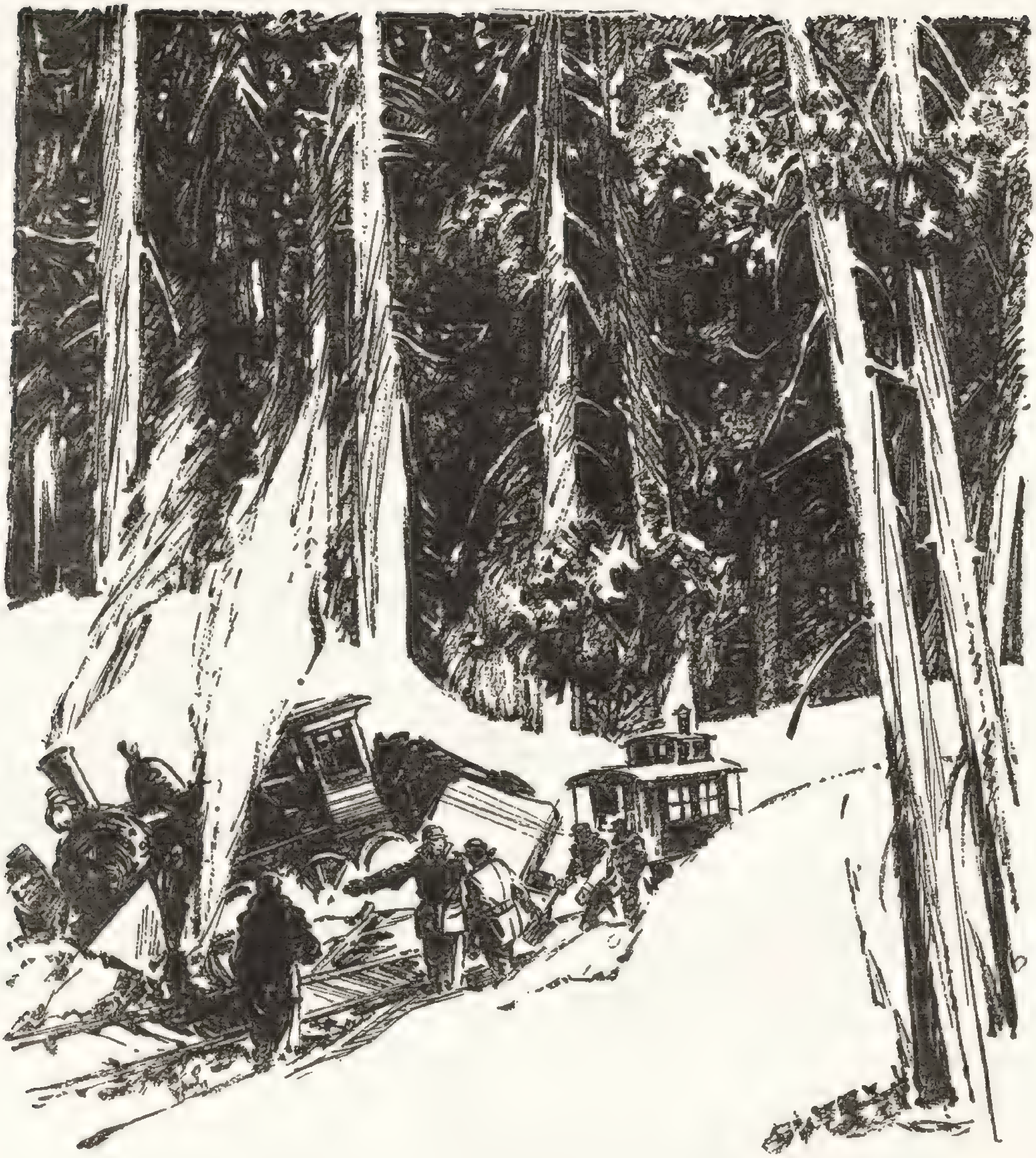
It is noticeable, furthermore, that while the judge must count regularly after he has given the word to fire, there is no prescription as to the length of time which may elapse between his calling of the combatants to attention, and the giving of the command. He may say "*Attention!*" and "*Feu!*" on the next beat of the metronome, or he may say "*Attention!*" and wait five minutes. If he chooses the latter course, and the metronome setting is reasonably fast, it is extremely unlikely that either of the nerve wracked duelists will come within fifty feet of his opponent.

There is a shooting gallery in Paris—it is run by the great manufacturer of dueling pistols, Gastinne-Renette — where dueling is practised as a sport, with life sized cast iron figures for targets. Competitors stand in separate booths at the same firing point, with two of these targets before them, and at the word of command shoot each other in effigy. Twelve shots make a round.

At one time, several years ago when I was living in Paris, I reached a state of grace where I could guarantee to hit my adversary twelve times out of the twelve, with perhaps eight in the much desired liver, which counts five; this with the metronome at 150.

My loader, who has been at the gallery for many years, congratulated me fulsomely; but appeared to have something else on his mind.

"Monsieur must however remember," he said, as he rammed down another change, "that the target has no pistol. Ahem! *Attention! Feu! Un—deux—trois—*"



OLD TOM BELKNAP, responsible for the Belknap lumber millions, usually was a good judge of men; but always he was bullheaded. So when young John Belknap, as big and as good a logger as could be found in the woods, came up to the main offices fully expecting and deserving to be sent to Kampfest, the ideal logging camp Old Tom and his boy had dreamed into reality, Old Tom said no. He said John was not yet ready for Kampfest.

John did not know his father was forbidding him his heart's desire for the simple reason that Gorbel, the manager at Kampfest, had at last fallen under the old man's suspicion. And when Gorbel had gone on the job it was over John's protests. John Belknap suspected Paul Gorbel of being a crook and his father swore by his integrity. Now Old Tom wanted to clear up the mess he had made before he gave the job over to his son. And it would be three months before Old Tom could get

Continuing

BELOW ZERO

An Epic Novel of the Great North Woods

By HAROLD TITUS

around to the task, because his doctors had ordered him away for a rest in Europe.

Young John flung out of his father's offices in a rage; and took train for the woods—any job but the one he was consigned to like so much duffle. And at Shoestring he stepped out of his day coach—to stop a lusty right swing square on the jaw.

A fight was exactly what young John was looking for, so he turned to—one against half a dozen, who, when they were not punching, were yelling for him to get out of town. Then the citizens who wanted none of young John Steele Belknap in Shoestring discovered they had got the wrong man altogether.

One of his attackers spoke up, shamefaced:

"We was expectin' another party, chum. A particular hard egg sent to clean us out by Old Tom Belknap!"

Further questioning revealed to John that the Richards Lumber Company, by which his attackers were employed, was just about at the end of its rope due to the unscrupulous tactics of the larger and wealthier Belknap & Gorbel outfit. When John learned that a bruiser had come down to the Richards job and crippled its superintendent, he resolved to apply for the post.

In the manager's office he found a girl—and Paul Gorbel. The Belknap boss was annoying the girl and John went in and chucked him out into the snow, keeping his identity a secret. The girl was Ellen Richards, who had been running the job since her father's death; and under the name of John Steele, John Steele Belknap went to work for her as superintendent of the company rival to Kampfest.

At the very outset he had trouble with some of the Richards men. One of them, Mark Saunders, was bitterly jealous of him and put every obstacle into his way. Finally, when Saunders insisted on risking his life on a strip of new ice, John saved him, very nearly losing his own in doing so. That won Saunders. That night in the men's quarters Mark made a speech.

His jaw was set when he said:

"I got just this to say: Steele's all wool and a yard wide. Anybody who don't want to work for him best not wait till morning to get going . . ."

CHAPTER VI

THE BREAKS OF THE GAME

THE WEAK link in the chain was welded. The uphill pull commenced to show progress. Forty thousand a day, John must put to the mill to keep the band saw fed. He began to do better than this; by holiday time the reserve decked in the yard had crept up a trifle; a two-day cut was there, waiting for an emergency; a three, enough for four days.

Not time yet for a long breath, but time to let yourself hope a trifle . . .

"I'll show you what I'm wound on!" he growled between set teeth as he watched a load going on to the deck instead of directly into the hot pond.

Not time yet for a long breath, though. The night watchman at the mill reported that in making his rounds an unidentified skulker had run out of the locomotive stall. A wrench was found dropped in the doorway and John put on a special man to guard Tiny's old relic, their only hope.

John met Burke, the B. & G. woods superintendent, at the crossing.

"How's she go?" the man asked.

"Not so good; we're still alive," John replied with a level look.

"Don't let 'em bluff you," Burke advised, but his air was patronizing.

Three days later, running for one of the stiff grades with four loads of logs bound for Kampfest, Tiny Temple looked back to see a car leave the rails, to see the splintered ends of ties pop up through the snow, to see the car take the ditch and go over before he could stop.

Wrecking tools were in Shoestring and it was necessary to make the run in for jacks and replacers. They got the car back on and the track repaired, but a day was lost and the margin of safety for the mill shrank instead of growing.

Waybill and Tiny came to John.

"A brake beam on that car had been monkeyed with," the conductor said. "You could see the fresh wrench marks on the nuts."

"What do you make of that?"

"They know we're doin' too well. Fixed to spill us to make trouble. They care a damn about getting their logs moved. The Kampfest yard's full and if we keep on the main line won't be able to clean out the switches at the crossing. More dirty work!"

John called Tucker into the conference, but the road master smiled and shook his head doubtfully.

"Fairy story," he said. "You couldn't tell within two weeks when that beam had been repaired."

Waybill spat and big Tiny eyed Tucker with a look that was not just pleasant. John wondered, feeling a bit uneasy. Thereafter he kept wrecking equipment in the way car.

And now Burke's men commenced dumping at two landings, which meant that it would be necessary to spot two strings of empties daily, more minutes taken from the time of Ellen's train crew. A man must take it and grin, though. John knew that; he had read the old contract by which Richards agreed to transport those logs.

More men came into the B. & G. camps; the production there picked up. More loads were completed for the driven Richards men to trundle over the ridge. Tiny Temple commenced to lose a bit of weight from the long hours he worked in the cab and, in Shoestring, repairing his racked locomotive.

"They're watching us," Saunders growled to John. "Damn 'em, they'll crowd harder the faster we go."

"Let 'em come. It'll show what we're wound on."

"Eh?"

"I said Tom Belknap 'll know he's been in a bear fight."

Since his coming to the job John had seen Ellen Richards irregularly and for brief intervals. When the work showed progress under his direction her dark eyes lighted with an animation which should have given a young man pause, because they were lovely eyes; when the derailment set them back a full day, she bit her lip and held her head higher, showing a pride and determination which should have nipped the interest of any youth. But of such details the man she knew as John Steele seemed oblivious.

When they talked it was of the job; only the job. He talked to her as he would to another man. His resourcefulness caused her to look at him with pronounced admiration; his bitterness, when he spoke of Gorbel or Belknap, set a puzzled expression on her face, It was almost as though a personal fight were being made against him; unusual to find a hired man keeping so high an emotional pitch over his employer's interests.

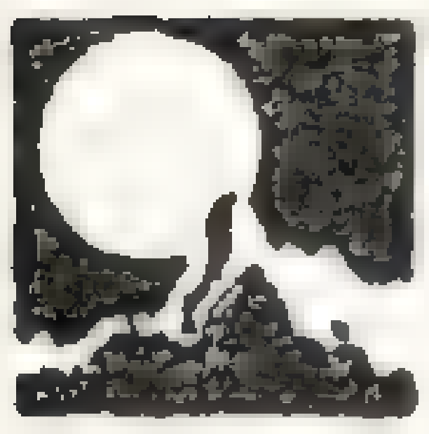
Ellen talked to him in detail of the company finances to point out the necessity of going even faster. Cars of air dried lumber rolled out of Shoestring; piles of green lumber grew. New loans, with lumber as security, were negotiated in Milwaukee to care for the curt demands of the Kampfest Bank.

"But we're only one jump ahead of disaster," she said. "These Milwaukee bankers have been so decent with us up to now, but there's no telling when their good nature will give out. If we should shut down it would bring them up here in a hurry. If we can just keep going."

They had not gotten abreast of the situation again as yet. A four-day tieup would leave the mill hungry.

"Luck is with us," Ellen said that night. "We've had no blizzards since you came. You seem to be able to checkmate their moves, but you can't beat bad weather."

"Cross your fingers," he said grimly.



RIGHT he was. The next afternoon the placid western sky hazed up and the temperature, which had been moderate for days, dropped suddenly. A restive, puffy wind began to blow and settled, toward dusk, to a moaning breeze which carried fine, stinging snow before it.

When the quitting whistle blew its voice was whipped away by the making gale; as the mill crew streamed homeward for the night they broke through growing drifts and bent low to the drive of the increasing storm.

Tiny Temple brought the train in an hour late, locomotive plastered with snow, festooned with icicles, and John, who had been busy in town all day, was there to meet him.

"Get your suppers," he told the crew. "She's going to be a buster. We'll run the plow tonight."

"That's the way to lick it," a brakeman said.

Two hours for food for the men and coal and water for the engine and to couple to the wing plow that stood ready on its siding. Men were there, a dozen of them, armed with shovels, sitting in the heated way car, waiting to give battle.

Tucker and John and two section men were in the plow; the first brace to ride in the lookout and watch ahead; the others to man the big wheel which manipulated the wings.

Wind tore about the cupola as they moved out of the yard; snow was driven through the rattling window sashes; the cold was intense. One could not see farther than the second telephone pole even where the track was bare, and the point of the plow threw no snow to mingle with that borne by the storm.

They had some shelter for the first mile up the long grade, but beyond that the track lay exposed in long sections to the wrath of the blizzard.

"Smart to come out tonight," Tucker said to John. "It would 'a' been a case of shovel in all these cuts if we'd waited until she stopped."

They were nearing the first bad point and he leaned forward to see better.

"Ready, there? Open your wings," he called and the men below bent on the wheel, turning it to force the wings outward so they would toss the displaced snow far to either side.

Behind, the locomotive shuddered and thundered as they rushed the first white barrier rising before them. John had a fleeting glimpse of great waves of snow curling out away from the track, saw an immense, up-ended cataract come over the front of the plow, flickering and fluttering as it drove back the beams of the headlight, shutting off their view completely. He felt their speed diminish as though velvet faced brake shoes had gripped the wheels and Tucker bawled—

"Let 'em in!"

A man at the wheel kicked the trip; the wings were squeezed back against the sides of the plow; they held their pace a moment longer and then came to a stop.

Back out, now, and look at the narrowing hole you've made in the cut. Pull off for another run at it; hold on, while Tiny gives her the last notch, threatens to beat the stack off her; brace yourself as you rock and bounce forward to charge it, rushing into the opening with the locomotive drive wheels grinding on sand!

They gave it all they had and broke through with the last gasp. They backed out; spread the wings and charged once more, widening the tunnel. Then on to fresh barriers, fresh conquests.

John's snow fences had functioned and some of the cuts were easy to traverse because of these barriers which caught and held the snow a hundred feet to windward, but in other places the going was impossible. A dozen times the shovelers were out, tossing snow from cuts that had blown, bank-full; standing aside and waiting to shovel the plow free when Tiny wedged it into the drift.

The wind held; snow fell faster. They were getting up the hump, but what lay behind was surely almost as bad as they had encountered on the outward trip.

At five in the morning they gained the main line crossing. Atop the ridge the snow had mostly blown away, but Tucker held the wings open until they approached the last switch.

"Bring 'em in," he called and chewed briskly as they bumped across the points.

It was the one place on the line where caution must be used with the wings; the one standard switch stand on the whole line was located there and to pass it with wings extended would mean detrailment.

JOHN had arranged for breakfast at the crossing tender's house by telephone before they left town, and as he watched the men fall to the steaming food he grinned a bit. The battle was not over yet, but he had held his own so far. He had checkmated old Tom's ruthlessness; he was wresting an even break from the weather. He would not have been so easy of mind, would not have taken such a fierce glory in the conflict with snow, had he known that late yesterday afternoon, in the shadow of a car of logs, Tucker had listened to Paul Gorbel while the man talked, slowly at first, as one feeling his way, rapidly later, as one who has achieved his end . . .

And now on into camp; hours of battle through the barren choppings until they gained the shelter of timber. Tiny must tinker for half an hour with his engine; men must rest. Fresh shovelers could be taken on at camp, but the engine crew could not be replaced.

John moved about restlessly during the two hours that his key men snored. No logs would move townward today but the mill would run, eating into its reserve, and the forest still rocked beneath the blizzard blasts.

They went out again, that short, hoary train, artillery to give battle to the storm gods; up the tedious grade, bucking, backing, charging. Long delays in progress came when shovelers went out to function, John leading them, throwing more snow than any, encouraging and flattering the best of them, driving the laggards.

Young John had an eye for everything.

As day waned the wind dropped and snow thinned. The temperature fell, too, but the back of the storm was broken. All that remained, now, was to reopen the road from the crossing on into Shoestring, seven miles and all downgrade. He felt relief as they trundled across the switches, the lights of which showed green before them in the coming dusk. He did not notice that Tucker watched him covertly and that when he climbed down from the lookout the man chewed briskly. They would soon stop for water.

John opened the plow door, waiting for that stop. The wings were spread and he could hear the fluff of snow they shoved out to either side.

Up above, alone, now, Tucker grasped the handrail tightly and braced his feet. One of the men at the wheel spoke to his mate and looked upward, a bit puzzled. That standard switch stand was just ahead.

From the engine came a muffled toot. Brakes set sharply. They slowed, but it was too late.

Tiny Temple had seen. He knew that switch as intimately as Tucker knew it. He tried to stop on the slight grade and on frost slick steel. Brake shoes gripped the wheels and sand streamed before them, but the drivers slid on cold tires.

From the right a thud and a rasping rattle as the wing caught the switch stand, tearing it from its anchorage. A jolt and a clank for the moving switch just as the plow's rear trucks met the point and the wheels dropped down on the ties.

"Off!" yelled John. "Jump, you!" He led the way, hurling himself out into the snow bank.

The plow bucked, careened, tilted. A splintering sound as the front trucks left the steel and with a rack and a crash the plow was on its right side and John was floundering in the snow, watching the locomotive. He saw her stick her pilot into the drift, saw the fireman leap, saw Tiny follow him. The engine, all the motive power they had, settled slowly to its side, carrying the tank over with it.

Excitement! Men were in the snow; men were shouting; the way car was spewing more men. Anybody hurt? Guess not! But we're derailed, man, *derailed!*

John was confronting Tucker.

"What the devil?" John was furious, ready to take the man apart.

"My God, Steele, I forgot!"

The road master was shaking, holding a wrist in the other hand.

"Forgot the damned thing!" he cried again. "Thought we were over the hump and—"

Something in his manner nipped John's attention, steadied his judgment, but he did not dwell on it then; neither did he speak further to Tucker.

He turned to the shovelers who were wallowing up from the way car.

"Get your shovels, half of you. Jim, take the rest of the boys back to that tie pile. Bring up a lot of 'em; all there are. Waybill, get the boys shoveling down to gravel, here. Tiny, uncouple your tender. Tucker, get some wood from that car yonder and build a fire—a big one. Snap to it now! You'll chow in an hour and then it'll be all night for most of you. Double time for every man that stays by it!"

Heart pounding, breath quick, he oversaw the first preparations. Made a monkey of, was he? Looked like it. He'd made his gesture, played his cards in defiance of his father. The main line branch was snowed in. A locomotive wouldn't be through for days. This was a man sized job for anybody; the best of men needed time to turn a trick like this, but no Richards man had time to do else but haul logs. Four days, perhaps only three days of run was left for the mill. He could see his fathers' face when the old man heard; he could hear Tom's disdainful laugh when he learned of this failure.

He hurried back to the crossing tender's house. The woman had enough grub for one more meal, anyhow. He telephoned Saunders at camp and ordered a team with food and blankets to start fighting its way through the timber.

He emerged into the night, looking up at the cold, bright stars. It was very still. Licked? Beaten? Had the winding come off, to show what was deep in him? He shut his teeth against the rising sickness of dismay.

He turned back to the house after a time, just as the flare from the bonfire his men had built commenced to light up the tangle of equipment across the track below him. He'd have to report. In a way, it was his predicament, but it involved another.

Ellen was still in the office and answered his ring.

"Bad news," he said, and he heard her breath catch.

"How bad?"

"We've got the plow and locomotive strung all over an acre of ground at the crossing."

She did not answer.

"Hear me?" he asked loudly, impatient with her, a girl in a man's job. A man would stand up and take it. "Hear me? No chance of getting a wrecker or even a locomotive in, even if we could pay the bill. I've got the jacks here and we'll go to work now. We ought to get out, say day after tomorrow."

"Day after tomorrow!" she cried, and he could hear her voice break. "Why, with no loads coming in that means—"

"I know what it means! We'll do our best. We could go faster if it wasn't so cold. It's below zero out here."

"Below zero," she echoed in a voice that was peculiarly flat. "So are our hopes!"

It looked that way and a queer emotion was rising from his heart, swelling his throat, making him flush and straighten and crowd closer to the telephone.

"Hello! Hello, Ellen! Hello!"

She had hung up and he turned away, rubbing his chin slowly.

"This is awful hard on Ellen," the woman said, as she hurried through the room. "My land! A girl, in such a fix!"

John's eyes followed her closely as she went through the kitchen doorway. He made an odd sound, something like a surprised laugh.

"That's so," he muttered. "That's so. It's a girl in a fix and I— She's only got me to depend on!"

Suddenly his job had taken on an amazing aspect. Until now it had been a fight against his father, Ellen Richards a convenient fulcrum on which to test his strength. But now, why, a lovely girl was in distress and he was her only champion!

CHAPTER VII

BURNING MANHOOD

AND now twin emotions drove the man known on this operation as John Steele to the task confronting him.

His rage against his father still held, but it was augumented by fear, and that fear was two-fold.

First came the fear that he was going to fail, that the laugh would be on him, to wither and shrivel his pride.

Second was the fear that Ellen Richards, suddenly become for him a lovely girl in distress, would see her fondest hopes go tumbling, her worst misgivings realized.

He could work hard enough, could drive men fast enough, when only rage spurred him; but with rage backed by fear he was a superman.

He needed to be just that in this emergency. Another would have given up; another would have quit, waited out the storm and sought succor from the main line. But the main line branch might not even be opened for days; the aid of a wrecker or only of a locomotive would be costly, and the Richards Lumber Company had no dollars to spend.

He thanked Providence that after last week's derailment he had carried wrecking tools in the way car. Otherwise a day and a night at the least would have been wasted in getting them out from town by team along such roads as the storm had left.

There under the stars, with frost dust eddying about the leaping flames of great bonfires, a score of men worked with the intentness of ants. Shovels cleared the snow from about the locomotive, exposing the raw earth, studded now with glittering crystals put there by the sub-zero cold.

Men broke through the ground's winter armor with picks and shoveled caverns beneath the locomotive to give the great jacks footing. A cross cut saw rasped and sang in swift tempo as ties were cut into short lengths for the crib work that would make the functioning of the jacks more than temporary.

The men ate in relays at the crossing tender's table, but John stayed on the job, swigging coffee, munching sandwiches as he walked restlessly from group to group seeing that no moment was lost, no movement wasted.

Tucker came from his meal, face drawn in the firelight.

"Don't you think we'd better get a switch point—" he began, addressing John.

The younger man whirled on him curtly.

"I'll run this show, Tucker. You might forget something again!"

Their eyes locked and the road master's fell after a moment.

"Hell, Steele, I may be in wrong, but I'd like to help."

"You can't, though," John said ironically, gesturing toward the man's wrist, which he had bandaged. "You can keep a fire in the way car . . . Yes, you'd better do that. I'm going to have coffee here all night. That'll be your job, Tucker—in the way car, and I wouldn't come out again, if I were you. The air in this locality isn't so good for a man with a bad memory!"

He wanted to talk to Tucker when he had time.

A delicate job, getting the first footing for your jacks in a place like that. With a lantern and pieces of stout cedar ties, John himself lay on his belly in the excavations beneath the prostrate locomotive and scraped out the last shovels full of earth and set the blocks. A long time it had taken; night was well advanced before the men came lugging the lifting devices up from the way car.

Carefully they set them, so purchase would come on the engine's frame at the proper angle, and John set the capstan bars and took the first few turns himself.

Once he had helped old Sandy do this same thing down at Witch Hill, but there they had good equipment, hydraulic jacks that were lifted with a pump handle; swift, easily operated machines. These old-timers were slow, would be hard on his men.

Slow, indeed. Two men on the bars, turning a short hitch at a time, there in a cramped position under the faintly sizzling locomotive; three full turns to an inch it took; many, many minutes to make those three turns.

He stood back, watching. The old engine creaked and snapped as they commenced to lift her. He watched the movement carefully, trying to gage it with his eye; watched the jacks, to see that they did not shift, had his men ready to start the crib work the moment there was room to place blocks so that if things went wrong and the locomotive slipped back toward her resting place they would not lose all.

Slow work, yes! But you can speed it a trifle by changing men, by relieving wearying arms with fresh muscles, by having your relays right there, ready to step in without the loss of a second; new hands ready to grasp the capstan bars before others have relinquished their holds.

Up she went, reluctantly, at the cost of terrible efforts. Mittens stuck to frosted steel, retarding effort; noses and cheeks burned with the cold and men had to watch their fellows for warning indications of frost bite. Some of the work kept a man's blood moving; at other jobs men were forced to go to the fires now and again, stand there and let glowing heat limber stiffening muscles.

But up she went. Crib work followed the lift of the jacks until they had raised to their utmost. Then back she settled an inch, resting on the cross piled blocks. Out came the jacks; in went new foundations for them; again men fell to the slow task of forcing the sixty tons of locomotive back to its upright position.

MIDNIGHT, and they had only run the jacks to their limit twice; two o'clock and his men were wearying, motions slower and with less sharp excited talk among them.

John wondered at the numbness which

had settled upon him and then recalled that this was his second sleepless night. He went to the way car and drank black coffee greedily. Tucker sat on a bench and asked uneasily about progress. John scarcely answered.

He did not need so many men now; he would need fresh men tomorrow and tomorrow night. He tolled them off, sending a half-dozen to sleep on the floor of the crossing tender's house; sending others to stretch out on benches in the way car. He tried to make Tiny go but the big engineer snapped at him. This was his engine in trouble; he'd stay by it awhile yet; he had to keep her alive, didn't he? And he wasn't going to let any one else do it, not even his fireman. Grimly he carried wood into the cab.

Things became fuzzy in John's head. A brash singing seemed to be in his ears. He wondered what it was and started. Dreaming on his feet of a band saw eating into that scant supply of logs decked beside the hot pond!

Dawn, with the locomotive up enough so they could commence to build track under her while the jacks screwed slowly to their limits again. Long ties were slid between the wheels, any old place you could get them. Drive them through, level 'em up after a fashion. A man laughed weakly. He had nodded off as he waited on his knees for them to shove a tie through for him to grasp. John slapped his shoulder and sent him off to rout another from his improvised bed.

Daylight, with every twig and wire and structure white with frost except where fire burned or men's hands touched repeatedly. Daylight, with a faint yelp of greeting to the northward and they looked briefly to see Saunders and a whitened team laboring through the snow behind shovelers. Grub and blankets! Food, and something for weary muscles to lie in.

All night John had been waiting to do one specific, necessary thing; not so essential, however, as this work. He tried to remember what it was. Something which had roiled him when he was not so tired; something which had made him want to take a man apart. Tucker! That was it; he was going to put Tucker on the grill and satisfy the suspicion in his mind. If this was his father's doing he wanted to know about it. Old Tom wrecking a girl's hopes by wrecking her equipment!

For a half hour he was alert because of the rage this suspicion engendered.

But when they called him to the telephone he walked stiffly, on feet that struck the packed snow heavily. It was Ellen calling and her voice was weary and faint.

Things stirred in him. He wanted to talk to her gently, to reassure her; to laugh at the situation, to defy chance to do them up in this round. But a man must be fresh for that. A man must have his wits and his strength to belittle such gravity and he felt himself sway as he stood there, wondering what to say.

"Going good," was all he could mumble. "Going great! The boys are wonders . . . When?" Ah, when could he tell her? "God knows," he muttered wearily, and hung up.

Breakfast. Saunders was beside him, fresher than the others. Blankets over strewn hay were in the way car; men rolled into them and dropped at once to heavy sleep. The bedroom in the house held others, three on the mattress, the rest on the floor.

John forced Tiny to turn in and the fireman as well. He set Saunders with a crew tearing up a switch point, getting ready. He swore at them when they took him by the arms and forced him to a cot in the crossing tender's tiny parlor. He awoke after noon to bound up and stand staring about in bewilderment in the low ceilinged room.

She was up now! Almost up on her feet! They had crib work on the other side to hold her from going on over before they were ready. Rails were torn up; ties were in place. The switch points were going in against the main line to set her back where she belonged.

Slowly she settled into place, wheels taking the one rail. Up she went on the other side, a fraction of an inch at a time. The other rail went in; spikes sank home; the jacks pulled in their necks. She sat square on the rails and the fireman had steam on her!

As a lemon colored sun dropped to its frost haze in the west, the locomotive spoke with its whistle voice once; it panted, stirred, backed out on to the main line and tired men cheered.

Night again; and more fires. But they had something to do with this time.

The way car was shunted out; a cable bent over the tender to help the jacks. It came up on the rails, was yanked out, set off, coupled in place and Tiny held the whistle cord down as he steamed forward over new track to put his power on the plow.

Dawn, it was, when they made up their train again, and as Tiny backed down to couple on to the way car John ended his talk with Tucker.

He had come in an hour before, when he knew that the job was done, when Waybill and Saunders and Tiny could handle the detail without his help.

Tucker was there, alone, poking at the fire, and looked up quickly as John closed the door behind him.

THE superintendent did not speak at first. He took off his cap, unbuttoned his coat, fumbled in his pocket for a cigaret and then, with the tobacco burning, sat down across the car from his road master.

He puffed a moment in silence; held the cigaret in his fingers and eyed the glowing coal at is tip.

“You didn't forget, you know,” he said almost casually.

“What?” The man's cry was startled; but the quality did not ring just true. “I didn't what?”

“You didn't forget, Tucker. A man who built this road wouldn't forget that switch. It just isn't in the cards that he could!”

The other drew himself up with a good show of ire.

“Well, that's the damndest thing that's ever been said to me!” he growled. “What could 've happened, if I hadn't forgot?”

He hurled the question confidently, as though it would settle this absurd charge.

“I think you deliberately ditched us, Tucker. I think you've sold out to B. & G. I think you're a—skunk!”

Tucker rose to his feet.

“Don't you say a thing like that to me—”

“Sit down!” Bite and sting in the tone; and fire in Johns' eyes and anger in his gesture. “Sit down!” he repeated with contempt; and the man settled to the bench from which he had risen with such a show of outrage. His face twitched; guilt sat heavily upon him.

“When I first heard of this whole situation here it sounded like something a writer had made up,” John said evenly. “From the minute I came on the job I knew it was real. We've speeded up; we should be showing a margin of safety, but we're not. Every move that's been made on this operation has been checkmated by a move from Belknap & Gorbel until we're about where we started. Every move that has slowed us up has been made deliberately, with design. This thing—” with a curt gesture—“was the most serious; the most blatant of all!”

He sat very straight and his eyes burned.

“You're on your way, Tucker. Have it that you forgot. Well and good—you forgot! And you're fired because you forgot, but you can take a message with you to deliver to Burke or to Gorbel or to whoever bought your manhood and decency. The message is from me.

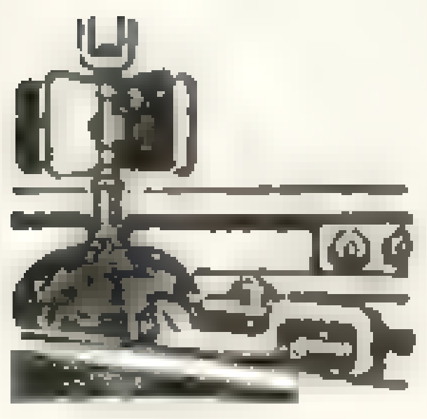
“Tell 'em we ask for no quarter. Tell 'em that I think they're snakes in the grass and that I'll treat 'em as I would snakes! The Richards outfit isn't out yet and I'll tell you why—” The plow backed down against the way car, coupling with a bump that rocked them both. “Those men out there are in a temper that's not to be monkeyed with and if you doubt it I'll continue this talk after they come into this car. Do you want to test their temper and their loyalty, Tucker, by having me keep this discussion up when they can hear? Up to now they've been too busy repairing the damage you did to think of how it happened. Do you want me to suggest an explanation to them—my explanation—and then stand aside? Do you think you'd be in one piece long after that—with your face green with guilt?"

He rose as feet stamped on the steps outside.

"Do you want that?" He leaned over Tucker as the knob turned.

"For God's sake!" the man whined, trembling, panic in his eyes. "For God's sake, Steele!"

John straightened with a hard smile of triumph and wiped his palms on his thighs. Until that moment he had possessed only suspicion; a suspicion so strong, true, that it led him into his flat, ugly charges. Now, however, he knew.



THEY opened the road to Shoestring by noon; red eyed, weary men dropped down from the train to meet Roberts, the mill foreman, and Ellen Richards.

Her face was strained and white, lined with the weariness that these last sleepless nights had set upon her. John's heart caught as he looked at her, saw the query in her dark eyes. He went quickly to her.

"Well, the flag still flies!" He laughed.

Her expression changed, was suffused by a look of deep gratitude and he knew, with a thrill, that it was for him, a peculiarly personal feeling.

"Yes—it flies!" Her voice, too, spoke of weariness and strain. "But by tomorrow noon we'll saw the last log here and the Milwaukee bank has heard of the trouble and is asking questions."

"We'll have an answer," he said, looking down into her face. He would have liked to take her hands in his, a touch of reassurance. "The crossing switches are still plugged with snow. It's the branch job to keep 'em open under the contract; not ours. Gorbel's cars are loaded, likely, but we certainly won't move 'em until there's a hole on the sidings.

"I'm sending the train back now. Tiny's all in, but the fireman can handle her. I'll be with him. By dark we'll roll in with a day's cut!"

"Oh, that's splendid!" she cried, looking up into his face as he stood close to her. "It isn't *all* bad luck, then, is it, John Steele? But if it hadn't been for you—Why, I've been thanking the Providence that sent you here ever since night before last! I—I've wanted to be out there with you, trying to—to thank you, to let you know that thanking you is a little too big a job for me!"

Warm, gentle, her voice, with heart in it, now; it was the first time her shell of self-control had really broken—his initial experience with her as a woman—and things caught at his throat as he stared into her troubled eyes.

"How can I ever tell you what it means to have—to have you here?" she breathed.

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I wonder if you could manage to smile a little," he said. "That'd be pretty good thanks, if I've any thanks coming on account."

She seemed to start, to look the harder at him because his tone differed from what it had been in the past. But after a moment she smiled, flushing a trifle.

"How's that?" she asked, and laughed.

He went about his job, suddenly resolving not to tell her of Tucker's treachery. She had enough in her heart without having to consider disloyalty among her men. He wanted to save her worries now; before, he had not cared.

To his bed went the fagged Tiny; out up the grade went the train once more, fireman at the throttle, John riding the cab with him. John's optimism was a bit broad. They were not back by dark, but at nine o'clock in the evening they rolled home with eight loads and, because John had telephoned ahead, Tiny was there to meet them and out into the night again went the train, beating up the grade, rolling down the other side into camp, lugging four loads up the long pull to the crossing; doubling back for another four and, as he crossed the branch, homeward bound with daylight not far off, he could see in the eastward the glare of headlights as the main line plow and locomotive bucked snow to open the branch and let Paul Gorbel demand that his loaded cars be moved.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIREBUG

HE WOULD demand that, too. One could tell by the glint in his gray eyes, by the set of his mouth that he would demand it as he sat listening to Tucker in the Belknap & Gorbel office at Kampfest.

Tucker had come in from Shoestring the night before; he was waiting when Gorbel appeared.

"Well!" the manager said when he saw the man. "Well, now!" And in his voice was the tone of extreme gratification.

He unbuttoned his coat and removed his cap of sealskin, eyes twinkling.

"It worked," he said.

"Yes—worked."

"What's the rub?"

"Rub enough. He saw through it."

Gorbel slid into a chair at his desk, leaning toward the man, pinching his lower lip thoughtfully with thumb and forefinger.

"Who? Steele?"

"Steele."

"Well, come on with it!"

Tucker sighed.

"I did it just as we figured out I could. The stand went over and threw 'em all ways from hell. Damn' near broke my arm when we took the ditch, and what's he do? The first thing, he saw through it! The first word he said showed me he saw through it."

The man's mouth worked.

"I made a play to help, but would he let me? He would not! He sent me into the way car to stay there, to keep coffee hot! Coffee hot! I couldn't get out. There wasn't any place to go but back to camp and that wouldn't 've helped.

"I went through hell, two nights and a day, sittin' there, wonderin' what 'd happen. Then he come in and what d'you think he threatened? He threatened to turn that gang on me, he did!"

"You admitted it?"

"Not on your life! But he knew. Hell, Gorbel, that lad's got second sight! I thought it wasn't goin' to be so bad when he first started talkin' to me until he looked at me. Those damned eyes of his go right through you!"

"What else? What'd he say?" Gorbel said impatiently as the man paused.

"He just said I was fired and then gave me a message to deliver to you. He said to you or to Burke or whoever hired me."

"You spilled your—" Gorbel began in hot accusation.

"Spilled nothin'! I tell you he looks right through a man. I lied my best and he sneered at me and threatened if I didn't come to you and tell you what he'd said that he'd tell the crew what 'd happened. And I wasn't going to squawk in the face of that! He's got 'em with him; they— Why, they'd have mobbed me yesterday!"

"What's the word he sent?"

"He said you was snakes in the grass and that he'd treat you like that, and he said to come on and do your worst, that he had his crew with him and wasn't going to be put out of the running yet awhile."

Gorbel leaned back and smiled scornfully.

"And don't think he's out, either." Tucker leaned forward suddenly, as if this were the most important thing he had to say. "Don't you believe it, Gorbel! He's a whirlwind, that lad! He's a logging fool and he knows his stuff. Hell, I've been railroadin' for logging outfits for twenty years and I'm here to tell the world that what I did would 've tied me up. It didn't tie him up. Nothin' you've done so far will. He'll keep that mill logged spite of hell and high water and you, Gorbel. He's—he's a loggin' fool!"

Gorbel pondered.

"Where'd he come from?" he asked.

"Down below, I guess. Stranger here. Ain't you seen him?"

The other grimaced.

"Once, I think. I'm not sure. Now, what can I do for you?"

Tucker crossed his knees as one will who is quite at peace.

"My pay, first. Then the job you promised if things went wrong for me."

Gorbel smoothed his hair, glancing a bit sharply at the man.

"The pay, of course. A job, though—that's another matter."

"Yeah. Quite."

Gorbel's look was not only sharp, this time; heat was in it.

"What's your idea of it?"

"Just this: if I squawk, what chance 've you got? Everybody in this country thinks you're ace high. I admit now it was a su'prise when you put this deal up to me, but you did and you took a drop in my estimation. More'n that, you sort of put yourself in my hands, didn't you? A job—and my mouth's shut for keeps!"

Paul Gorbel fidgeted in his chair. The man spoke the truth; he had for the first time in his experience stepped over the bounds of safety. He had no hold on this man Tucker. Something he had not experienced in his life began to stir within him, something which he had so carefully guarded against was forming. That thing was fear.

JOHN had been in camp for two nights. The train rolled in on time the next morning and from the way car emerged unusual passengers. Three dogs first, great, shaggy mongrels; a travel worn toboggan was next shoved through the door by Waybill. Then packs of various sizes. Finally, as odd a human being as John had observed in a long time.

He was short and thin but from the spryness of his movements it was certain that muscles of steel cloaked the small frame.

His cap was of coonskin, with huge ear flaps and a long vizor now folded back against the crown. His beard was gray, streaked with brown, and covered his face almost to the small bright eyes. His coat was of bearskin, hitting him at the hips. Great gauntlet gloves of fur were on his hands and moccasins covered his feet.

"Here, Jumbo! Come on back here!" he called sharply to a dog who moved stiffly, roach bristling, toward the hog pen. "Come back here, now, Jumbo! Leave them hogs alone. Loves hogs, Jumbo—" looking up briefly at Waybill as he reached into the car for his snowshoes. "Loves to tease an' kill hogs, Jumbo. Great dog, Jumbo—come back, now!"

The dog stood stiffly pointing in the direction of the pen, and the old man yanked off a glove and, fingers in mouth, whistled shrilly. The dog came in.

He was starting to stow the packs on the toboggan when John approached. Seeing him, the old man spat and nodded and went on in his high pitched voice:

"Name's Richards!" he yelped. "Wolf Richards! Wolf Richards from Mad Woman! Uncle to Ellen on her pa's side. Name's Steele? John Steele. Heerd 'bout you; know all 'bout you! Curious 'bout you, so come back thisaway to take a look-see at John Steele much 's to save time gittin' back to Mad Woman.

"Wouldn't come in if I'd been able to pack out enough grub before snow come. Wrenched my back an' no could do much. Lucky couldn't. Wouldn't 've heerd 'bout Ellen's trouble if I'd stayed in. Interestin' trouble. Interestin', seein' man who ain't scared from Tom Belknap's shadder!"

All this, with scarcely a pause to draw breath, and when John stopped beside the man his eyes were twinkling. More like a figure in an extravaganza, this Wolf Richards seemed, than a regular, honest-to-goodness citizen.

"Big feller," he went on, not pausing for more than a fleeting glance upward as he shook out a tarpaulin to cover the packs. "Big feller. Handsome feller, too."

Waybill was grinning from the steps as he gave the highball and John saw the conductor point and nod at him for Tiny's benefit. The exhaust of the locomotive as it started to back made talking difficult, but the little man kept on, squealing the louder to make his voice carry.

"No wonder a girl gets soft 'bout a big feller, handsome feller who's a handy man to have in time o' trouble. Can't fool me, girls! Ellen 'special'. Knowed her too well sence she was—"

But the locomotive, directly abreast of them, drowned his words for the interval and John looked up into Tiny's face, apoplectic from suppressed mirth. Evidently, the train crew knew the little character and guessed what was being said.

"No use gettin' moony in time o' trouble. Time enough to go sparkin' an' courtin' when things is easy at th' mill. Told her . . ."

He tugged at a lashing rope and grunted, the only breaks in his flow of talk.

"Name's Richards—" rising and extending a hand. "Pleased to meetcha. Glad to meet folks. You—Richards's my name."

"Hello, Mr. Richards," John said. "I'm glad to see you, too."

"Thought you would be. Ellen said so. Said I'd be welcome to stay long's I like. Sure love the camps; love folks. Don't see many at Mad Woman. Feller livin' alone, makin' a business bein' 'lone, don't want folks, ordinary. When he wants 'em he wants 'em in droves. Like camp. Like camp fer few days now'n' then. Ellen said she'd be out 'fore I went, likely. Hope so! She'd ought to come visit me to Mad Woman. Looks peaked! Too much work! A man's job's pretty hard on a girl."

He stepped close and the metallic quality went from his voice.

"She looks bad," he said softly, and in the queer little eyes John detected genuine concern. "She's all I got, now; I'm all she's got. Queer, they call me, but I—I got feelin's like anybody else, Steele. If anything happened to Ellen I dunno what I'd do. I set an' think 'bout her when I'm on th' Mad Woman; when she's there I like to cook for her, y' know; I like to see her rest an' sleep. She's all I got—Ellen."

There was something pathetic in this earnestness.

"Well, it might do her good to visit you, Wolf," John agreed. "But that's up to her. I'm only a hired man. Make yourself comfortable and keep your dogs out of the hog pen."

"He! He! Say, you'd ought to see that Jumbo wrastle a hog! Gives 'em a battle, he does. Gits 'em on their back an' then it's all day. Good sled dog, too. Fit an otter last week, an'—"

"Well, you make yourself comfortable," John broke in again. "I've a job to do, but I'll see you at dinner."

He tore away, leaving the little man still spewing words as he walked over to the barn to join Jack Tait and Saunders.

"Who's Richards?" he asked, and they grinned. "He says he's Ellen's uncle and he's already proven that he's entitled to some sort of talking championship!"

"He's her uncle." Saunders chuckled. "Her dad's only brother. 'Course, he's cracked. Damn' good trapper, too; would make well at it, if he'd leave wolves alone, but when he hears of a wolf or thinks he knows where one might show up, he'll stay by him until he gets him or drives him out of the country. Lives alone away down on the Mad Woman. Has for years. They all get that way, you know."

"Yup," Jack Tait agreed. "A queer old duck. Harmless for the most part, but he'll make trouble yet, I'm afraid. You'd think, to see him in town or here, that he was the friendliest codger alive, but he ain't. Won't take a stopper-in at all when he's home. Wouldn't even let his own brother in. If he's away, it's all right for folks to use his camp; but if he's there he'll let 'em starve or perish before he'll help. All but Ellen. She goes up to see him for a day or so now and then. He's real human when he's with her, I guess. Fusses over her like a woman would."

UNTIL the noon hour John thought no more of Wolf Richards. He and Saunders were busy trying to figure a way through the complications which confronted them.

Burke had put on even more saws at

the B. & G. camps. The switches at the crossing were plugged with loaded cars, bound for Kampfest; equipment breakdown on the branch had delayed movement, but when John had called this to Burke's attention, arguing that it got his employers nothing to keep insisting that their logs were moved to the crossing as soon as loaded, the man only grinned.

"Orders are orders; contracts are contracts. I've got mine; go read yours, Steele!"

And so John buckled down to the uphill pull.

"Snow will slow them up as much as it does us," he told Saunders. "If we could only build up a week's run down yonder!"

"We may, if we get all the luck; and if we keep up production here."

Something of pride in the old fellow's voice, then. His woods crew was functioning without a hitch, making logs cheaply, loading them promptly.

John entered the cook shanty late, but instead of the usual, traditional, voiceless group, he found the men bent low over their plates, many snorting with repressed laugher while Wolf Richards, mouth filled with food, talked without cessation.

"Love to eat after 'nother cook. Love grub. Love different grub. Love fresh pork, like Jumbo. Love hog. My goodness, ain't them string beans elegant? My, my! Fat of the land's what you live on—Hello, Mr. Steele! Fine cook, you got. Cook good enough for any hotel in St. Louis, I bet! My, my, ain't them pickles tasty!"

John let the old fellow go. In the first place, nothing else was to be done; again, the men seemed to enjoy it.

Through supper and for a brief time in the office afterward, the old trapper's voice held to its sustained, shrill gabble. Then, abruptly, he rose and, divesting himself of his outer clothing with rapid jerks, jumped into the bed assigned him and within seconds was snoring.

Jack Tait came in to talk to John, who sat before the stove, smoking and going over plans with Saunders. He was there a few minutes and went out. Saunders yawned, rose and stretched. He rid himself of his chew and unbuttoned his shirt.

The light was turned out and superintendent and foreman lay in their beds, still talking in low voices.

"I feel like a fella at the edge of a big drop-off in the dark," Mark said, and stirred in his blankets. "Everything's rosy so long's we keep the ground under our feet, but any step ahead's likely to send us tail over ears down to the rocks, yonder. Somethin' might happen here in the woods to slow us down; Tiny's old coffee pot may go all to hell in a heap, and then where are we?"

"Over the edge," said John morosely, and rolled on to his side.

Things bothered him; new things. Ellen Richards bothered him, for one. He could not get the sound of her voice when she said that her hopes had gone below zero out of his mind. Again and again they recurred, tugging at his heart strings, making him uncomfortable. And today old Wolf had yelped about courtship and romantic feelings. Was the girl, too, bothered with these strange emotions when she thought of him? Scarcely. He had wanted to talk to her, to tell her that now the job was something besides a chance to show what he was wound on, but opportunity had not presented itself. And he wondered what she would think or feel or say or do if she knew that his name did not stop at the Steele indicated on her payroll, but went on to that other name, the one she hated, the one that was now casting a shadow over her hopes and her future. He had a helpless feeling at thought of his father. He seemed like an ogre now; a dragon imperiling a fragile girl. It was not pleasant to think of his own father playing such a rôle—with such a girl.

For a long time he lay there, sleepless. He dozed and suddenly saw his father pursuing some one who fled toward him, screaming for his help, and this other, suddenly revealed, was Ellen Richards.

He woke with a start and rolled over. There were sounds coming from outside.

Heavy thuds. Horses kicking! A number of horses kicking and a shrill, frightened nickering.

His feet hit the cold floor and he lunged to a window.

"Turn out!" he croaked, as he whirled back to grope for his pants. "Turn out, you! The barn's afire!"

Orange light had showed through windows and cracks in the structure yonder. It flickered faintly across him as he stamped into his pacs, not stopping for socks.

Saunders was up; Jerry was rolling out, babbling as sleep added to his panic. Wolf Richards chattered shrilly.

Fire in the barn!

"Fire!" John yelled, as he ran outside and, buttoning his coat over his underwear, lunged for the men's shanty. "Fire! Out, you bullies! Fire!"

He did not wait to hear them hit the floor. He went on, Saunders hard after him.

Horses were squealing and kicking furiously. He heard wood splinter under a hoof and could see, through the partially opened doorway, the low cavern of the barn lighted by angry flames. Smoke rolled up through the ventilators.

He was into it, headlong, throwing an arm over his face to strain smoke from the air he breathed. He caught the odor, though, and through his mind went one word, like a streak of red rage—

Gasoline!

A WINDROW of hay along the center of the building burned. Flakes of the bales, half torn apart, were strewn there, it seemed, and they burned brightly, orange fronds of flame leaping upward to find hold on cobwebbed rafters as the draft from the ventilators sucked the gases through the roof. Smoke swirled about the floor and John stumbled as he ran on, striving to gain the rear stalls first.

He choked as he entered the stall, but gasped the horse's name over and over, putting a hand on the rump, hesitating a moment, watching the wringing tail. He slipped past as the horse kicked blindly.

"Come on, boy," he said, trying to speak without excitement. "Steady, now! All right!"

The big Percheron was crowded forward, trying to raise his forequarters and clamber into the manger to be away from the flames that licked along the litter close to his heels.

John jerked the halter rope loose.

"Back, you! Back an inch!"

The horse obeyed, backed, trembling and snorting, until fire licked about his hock. Then with a scream he leaped into the stall again, moaning, kicking.

It was a test for John's strength to hold the powerful head down. He was crowded into a corner and swung the rope end stoutly across the animal's head to drive it back.

He tore at his mackinaw, then; slipped it from his shoulders.

"Come along—whoa! Give us your head now! Steady!"

The horse squatted, holding his head high, but John threw the coat over it, gripping the folds beneath the horse's throat to hold the blindfold secure.

"Back, now! Back up, you!"

He jerked backward on the halter and shoved with his shoulder. The horse moved out. Flame touched his fetlocks again and he shivered and cringed, but backed.

"Come along, boy. Come along, now."

They went at a slow walk. The horse sidled, banged into a stall stanchion, leaped the other way, kicked as flame touched his belly. He broke, tried to run and John went with him, choking, strangling from the smoke, bumping into another led horse, out into the night . . .

Men were running; others were back in there, shouting at horses.

"Here, you! Take him! You, Jack, help! Lead him away! Don't let him bolt!"

And as soon as those four brawny hands had the halter John was back into the inferno again.

Jack Tait, swearing furiously, clad only in his underwear, passed him, leading a gray horse. Two other men fought with a panic stricken beast that would not budge even though blindfolded. Into a stall went John. The horse there seemed calmer; tembled, twitched, moaned and coughed but did not kick. Nor would he lead. He stood there, snuffing, rolling his eyes, ears up, and he would not move.

"Get a blanket!" John shouted to a man, but the man did not hear.

No time, either, to send for help. The flames were roaring, now, spreading across the roof boards, licking into the stalls. The heat was unbearable.

"Got you!" he choked and dropped the halter rope.

He raked the harness from its hook with one movement.

"Whoa!" He set the hames down on the neck with a force that made the creature flinch. "Come along, now."

Reluctantly, snuffling, but obeying, the horse moved outward. Another man joined him to tug on the halter rope and John, liberating one hand, stroked the animal's nose reassuringly.

They breathed the fresh air again.

"How many in there?" John yelled, grabbing Tait's arm as the barn boss, crying, ran past him.

"All out but two. Prince won't come!"

Tait was gone then, others at his heels.

"Careful of him! Hang to it!" John yelled as a big sorrel, rearing to his hind legs, lifted the man that led him from his feet. "Get hold with him! You, there! Get all those horses into the blacksmith shop, the tool house! Get 'em in and shut doors behind 'em!"

He ran out himself to help two men who were being carried back toward the blazing stable by a terror stricken horse, following the impulse to seek his stall in that moment of frenzy. The animal was surrounded and overpowered.

John saw men struggling with a horse inside and ran in to their aid.

The heat was like a furnace. The roaring of flames was like the voice of a mighty river, punctuated by explosive cracklings as hemlock burned greedily.

He found a pitch fork and got behind the horse, striking it without mercy, prodding with the tines. The animal screamed and kicked. It leaped ahead and swung about and John struck it again, ducking a blazing brand that grazed his shoulder.

They got the animal out and Jack Tait reeled to one side, gagging with nausea. John backed from the building, shielding his face with an upraised arm. Flames were through the roof, licking at the cornices, melting holes in the walls.

"All out, Jack?" he croaked.

"Look out!"

THE WARNING shout made John whirl. He threw himself forward to grab at the rope as the horse shook off the last restraining hand, throwing a man end over end, as he wheeled and broke for the stable. John caught the rope. He made it with only one hand. He clenched and braced—and was snapped from his feet as though his weight were so many ounces. He catapulted through the air and came to a stop against the side of the barn with a shock that stunned him, while the horse charged on through.

A man followed, running rapidly. Then the horse that had bolted back screamed shrilly. John could see him inside, outlines distorted by wriggling heat waves. He crouched low and rushed in.

Heat flowed about him, eating through his coat, needling into his flesh. It seemed to shrivel his lungs, to close his throat. He shut his eyes to slits to save them the agony. He staggered and gasped and went on.

He heard the horse scream again and kick. The terror of the creature's cry gave him strength. Clear to the rear it had gone, up into the stall where it had found rest and warmth and food after long days of toil against weighted collar. It screamed the third time and John dropped to his hands and knees for relief.

He stopped crawling. He had almost gone on—across that thing. It felt like a bag of oats, a sack of inert material, until his hand brushed flesh.

He flopped about, pawing rapidly, and drank in the vapors of hell with his indrawn gasp.

He had come upon a man, lying there, when he sought to save a horse.

No use shaking him; no sense in calling out. He was beyond that, this fellow, else he would have moved.

John grasped a limp hand and pulled the figure about. He got to his feet and, bent double, ran three steps. The heat and the burden beat him down. He hitched the man along, a hand's breadth at a time. An eddy brought in a gulp of fresh air. He rose again and made a stride or two—and went down, cowering from the terrific punishment of standing.

More air, as a bit of roof fell in and uprushing gases sucked it in from outdoors.

Another man was crawling toward John from the doorway. He reached out and a second hand locked on the wrist. They went for the open with a rush.

It was Jack Tait who had come in to help.

"Who—who's this?" John choked, rolling the man over.

Firelight, brilliant, unshadowed, fell on the face as a score of men pressed about.

"Never saw him," panted the barn boss.

"He's about done. Stand back, give him air, you lads!"

Some one began to fan the face with a cap and John Tait plucked at John's arm.

The old veteran was holding up a hand, bloodstained. That hand had just turned the unconscious man's head over, had been pressed against the side of the skull.

The others did not see because Saunders was yelling for men from the now smoking cook shanty where a bucket brigade was forming.

"Get over with Mark!" John ordered those about him. "Jack and I'll 'tend to this lad."

The group scattered.

The burden that the two carried was not heavy. They went across the trampled snow toward the office, walking the faster as they neared their objective.

John lighted the hanging lamp and they stood, looking down into that set face.

"Never seen him," the barn boss said.

"Nor did I."

Gingerly, John examined the great mark on the skull, tracing it out with his fingers through the thick hair.

"What's it shaped like?" he asked, looking up.

"Horseshoe. There's where the calk went in—" pointing.

Tait stared hard at John.

"You notice anything special in the barn?"

"Smell, you mean?"

The other nodded grimly.

"I smelled gasoline," John said.

"So did I."

Jack spat nervously.

"Where was he?"

"Right behind your pile of baled hay."

"Prince got him!" Jack muttered. "He's the only horse in the lot that's light behind. He—" gesturing— "touched the place off and Prince got him."

Saunders came in, breathless, slamming the door.

"Got her soused down," he said. "Worst's over. Who's that?"

"Ever see him?" John asked.

A pause, while the foreman stared hard at the face.

"Never."

"And what did you smell?" John demanded.

Mark looked from one to the other.

"Did you both get it?"

"Both of us."

"A firebug! Damn 'em, they'll—"

John held up a warning hand.

"It's between the three of us, for now. Keep it from the men. This fellow was suffocated, as far as they know. Stranger; drunk; got in, tried to smoke—and here we are!

"But the three of us smelled gasoline. This man's hair isn't even singed. See? He didn't die from fire. It was the kick of a horse. We find out who he is and where he came from and we may make things as hot for other parties as they made them for us tonight."

Hot for other parties. And, even as

John swore that this thing would not go unpunished if he could track it down, a sort of terror seized him. Old Tom, his father, behind this? The thought was like a blow. It made him go weak.

A man's temper can stir him to bitterness against those for whom he has had affection. But old loyalties, old respects are hard to down. For nearly a month John Belknap had thought of his father as an enemy, but this night's work killed his temper, replaced it with a profound, racking fear.

Old Tom in a rough and tumble fight, yes. That was imaginable. But old Tom resorting to the torch? That was unthinkable, did not square with anything in experience.

A shock will tear scales from human eyes and now, standing there in the presence of violent death, in the presence of these true men, knowing that this particular tragedy could never be of Tom Belknap's doing, the boy felt doubt of recent hot convictions surging through him.

A hard old bird, men had said of his father; a relentless fighter when driven to it—when *driven to it!* But a fair fighter, it was agreed; even beaten enemies had admitted that.

He looked about, gaping at the others, and sent them out to make sure there was no chance of spreading fire. He needed to be alone.

Old Tom in this mess? It could not be; simply was beyond all reason! That the responsibility for all Ellen Richards' trouble should rest on his father's shoulders seemed to be reasonable—*seemed* to be. But it could not be. His father was no incendiary; his father was no wrecker; his father, gruff and bluff as he was, unjust as he may have been to his own son, would not hire bullies to maim the men of other employers, would not take unfair advantage of a weaker competitor!

John drew his palms over his face and shuddered. The whole thing was a nightmare; some wild, impossible fancy. Bad enough to have one who meant more to you than any other man in the world under such black suspicion, and far away where an appeal for explanation could not be properly made. But that was little compared to the conflict now rending his heart: that clash between what Ellen Richards believed of his father, and what he was coming to believe of her—that she was something more than an employer, more than just another lovely girl.

CHAPTER IX

NEW SCORES FOR RECKONING

THE BARN was gone; one horse was gone; some harness was burned and the rest in a sorry tangle. Not a pound of feed was left in camp.

After the embers ashed over the crew turned in. John ordered the stranger's body placed in a box car on the siding, shut the door and told the men to keep away. The belief that an unknown man had wandered into the barn and inadvertently set it off was well established.

But in the office a small group stood, or sat, while John repeatedly made unavailing efforts to rouse central. For once Wolf Richards was struck so close to speechlessness that he did not monopolize time and ears. He sat blinking his beady eyes as if overcome by the things that happen to men who live in groups.

It was four o'clock before John's persistent ringing brought an answering, sleepy voice. He called Roberts, the mill foreman, at his house, not wanting to disturb Ellen.

Rapidly he told what had happened.

"We'll need a car of lumber," he said, "and saws and hammers and nails. The fire was set by a drunk who wandered in. He suffocated. Send the sheriff out with the train to take charge of that angle. Guess I've told you everything. Don't forget the grain and hay. And you'd better be stirring now and get Tiny and Waybill out."

Evidently Roberts did, for while the crew was still at breakfast the scream of the locomotive's whistle came echoing down the forest.

They had not stopped to hook on to empties. The car of lumber and the caboose made up the train.

Ellen was the first off. Her mouth was set and the nostrils of her small, shapely nose dilated.

Old Wolf ran toward her as she dropped from the way car and John could see the paternal light in his face, the protecting posture in his whole body as he reached out for the girl. They spoke together and it was evident from her look that this odd old man was something more than a caricature to her; that beneath his eccentric exterior was a heart and a soul that rendered her something of what she needed in a time of stress.

Their meeting was so obviously a personal affair that John did not approach until Ellen, who had been looking at him an interval while she listened to her uncle, raised her chin in a beckoning movement.

"One more body blow," she said as he came up.

Her tone made him wince, and the fragment of a smile which she sought to summon wrenched at his heart. It was unfair for a girl to be forced to mix in a man's fight.

"No getting around that," he agreed. "But it might be a lot worse. Suppose the whole set of camps had gone? Where'd we be then? I went right ahead without consulting you and I guess we'll have a new barn, of a sort, up by night."

He took her over to the ruins, outlining his plan for reconstruction, talking steadily and a bit swiftly as her few replies and the set of her mouth made him know something of what went on within her. He did not go into his theory of the fire's origin.

"There's loss, of course," he said, finally. "One horse gone; some harness ruined and some lost; several hundred dollars worth of feed gone up in smoke. But they haven't got us licked yet!"

"Haven't they?" she asked, and in the tone was a cynicism, a suggestion of surrender that chilled him.

He looked about quickly. Men were coming and going, scraping away ruins, bringing up lumber.

"Come into the office," he muttered, and turned to lead the way.

Alone, there, she stood before him, wearily drawing off her gloves.

"Don't quit now," he said. "It's a body blow, yes; but we're not licked, Ellen! We're not through yet. We've only commenced to fight."

She looked up at him, studying his face with her large eyes, and smiled a trifle—with her lips, not with her eyes.

"You're fine," she said softly. "You—without you doing just what you've done I'd have given up weeks ago, I'm afraid. You've done so much for me, you've fought so well and so hard to make a showing . . . But it seems a little unfair, doesn't it? It seems as though the cards were stacked against us, to have a thing like this happen, on top of all the things that are planned and executed against us."

She turned away suddenly, as though fearful of breaking down before him.

"I wish I were a man!" she said tensely. "I'm tired playing a man's part; worn out with trying not to show what I think and feel and—fear."

John stepped forward and put his hands on her shoulders, forcing her to face him.

"I'm glad you're not a man," he said gently and felt her tremble a bit. "I'm glad you're just—who you are. It's a tough break to have to face all that's come before you, but I want you to know, now, that this job is something more than just a matter of services rendered, and pay received, and experience, for me. It wouldn't be any more than that, Ellen, if the one who stands to win or lose were a man. It wouldn't be—what it is."

HER LIPS had parted a bit and he felt her tremble as his fingers pressed the firm flesh beneath her mackinaw.

"Oh," she said weakly. "Oh—that!"

"That," he repeated with a vehement nod. "And the reason I haven't said it before, the reason I haven't said a lot of things that there are to be said, is because trouble has been coming too fast. In a pinch, survival comes first; living afterward. That's one thing I want to say. The other is that you'll have to keep up your courage. I don't want you ever again to say to yourself, even, what you said to me out there. I want you to keep on saying and thinking and believing what you said to Gorbel that night when I stood outside your office door—that we may lose, but we'll go down fighting! And we're not going to lose!"

"It isn't that I don't want to win, John," she protested. "I want it more than I've wanted anything else! It was my father's heart that went into this operation. The last years of his life went into it, all his hopes and all his energy. I feel that children owe their fathers something; that it's up to us to carry on. My father's memory is here, in my heart. I owe it to him to finish what he set out to do. Isn't that natural? Don't you have that same feeling of high regard for the things your father wanted to do, or wants to do?"

He looked away and his brows gathered.

"My father—yes! He's right. He's always been right! He'll always be right!"

His vehemence startled the girl and he looked deep into her eyes. He wanted to tell it all then and there, wanted to cleanse her mind of the impression it held. Wanted to say:

"My father is the man you suspect of building all these obstacles in your path; my father is the man who you would suspect of other fantastic acts which have been committed against you if I'd let you know *all* that has happened. My father is the man you loathe. But he is *right;* he is guiltless. I know, because I am his son!"

He wanted to say those things but he could not, when all the evidence available on this side of the Atlantic was against him.

What he said was—

"We're going to keep on, waging this fight of your father's, but I'm going to keep on worrying about you unless you'll clear out of this mess and chase the look out of your eyes that's been there since a week ago, when we piled up the plow!"

"Clear out? What are you thinking of, John? You don't mean—"

"Why, worry is wearing you down. I—I can't stand it to think of you alone in town there, lying awake nights, in a panic daytimes. It gets me, I'm telling you. Can't you get away? Couldn't you go down the river with old Wolf for a few days? He wants you."

She laughed weakly.

"Away, now, when things are—"

"Yes, now! The job's important, but you—why, you're something else again! Oh, how can I tell you, here and now? You're something more than a part of the job, Ellen!" He was leaning close to her, drawing her toward him, lifting her hands. "You're something bigger and more splendid than I ever thought life held! You're all that there is or has been or ever will be under the sun or the—"

"John!" she whispered.

He spoke her name but before their lips could touch the door opened, and they had scant time to break apart before Wolf Richards burst in.

"Lookit!" he said, holding up fragments of a glass. "Lookit what I found out yonder, Johnny! Found 'em in th' ashes, right in th' middle of th' barn. Jug, I'm tellin' you. Jug, it is! What's a jug doin' in the middle of a barn, eh? Whisky, likely. You're right. He was drunk an' touched her off. He—"

He stopped talking as John took the fragments of glass from him and eyed Ellen closely. Her face was flushed from the untimely intrusion and the old man chuckled to himself.

"Time an' place for all things," he cackled. "Some things go any time, any place!"

As John left the office a man whom he had seen repeatedly in town approached.

"Steele?" he said. "Bradshaw."

"Hullo, Sheriff. Knew who you were, of course. Now, Ellen—excuse us. The sheriff's errand isn't exactly pleasant. Mark'll get things going right off."

Indeed, even as he and the sheriff turned away men were handing sacks of feed down from the car, others were moving bales of hay. Over by the smoking ruin men with shovels were at work and the binding boards of the car of lumber were being ripped off.

"Stranger, eh?" the sheriff said as he pulled back the blanket and looked into the face of the dead man. "Stranger to all your boys?"

"None of 'em ever saw him."

The other nodded.

Step by step John went over the story, speaking softly as he told of the certainty that he and two others had smelled burning gasoline, telling of the jug fragments just now discovered. He traced the mark of a horseshoe on the skull, pointed out the clear impression of a calk; began to argue a bit as the sheriff squatted there, unresponsive, chewing on a cigar stub, almost bland, almost disinterested.

"My guess is this," John said. "The same people that have been badgering us for weeks pulled this. They sent this poor devil in here with a jug of gasoline. He shook hay out along the barn floor, poured the gas on it and touched it off. He'd naturally start her to the rear first and as he bent over to set it going behind Prince, the horse got him."

The sheriff scratched a match and lighted his frayed cigar. He stood in the partly open doorway of the box car, staring blankly out into the forest. Then he cleared his throat.

"I'm goin' to tell the coroner just what everybody else out here but you seems to think," he said. "I'm goin' to tell him that here was some bum walkin' in for a job. He gets to camp, sees everybody's in the hay and knows he's likely to catch hell if he wakes 'em up. So he slips into the barn, which is warm enough for anybody to sleep in, lights his pipe, goes to sleep and—there you are!"

"But, good Lord, Sheriff, aren't you going—"

"Hold on a minute!"

He eyed his cigar stub, again extinct, and threw it away.

"I do things in my own way. I've been watchin' what went on here a long time. I been watchin' you and what you've done since you took hold. It's enough, what I've seen; enough to judge you and to make a pretty good guess at what else went on.

"Your friend here—" jerking his thumb toward the figure beneath the blanket—"went to work for Burke at the B. & G. camp last Monday."

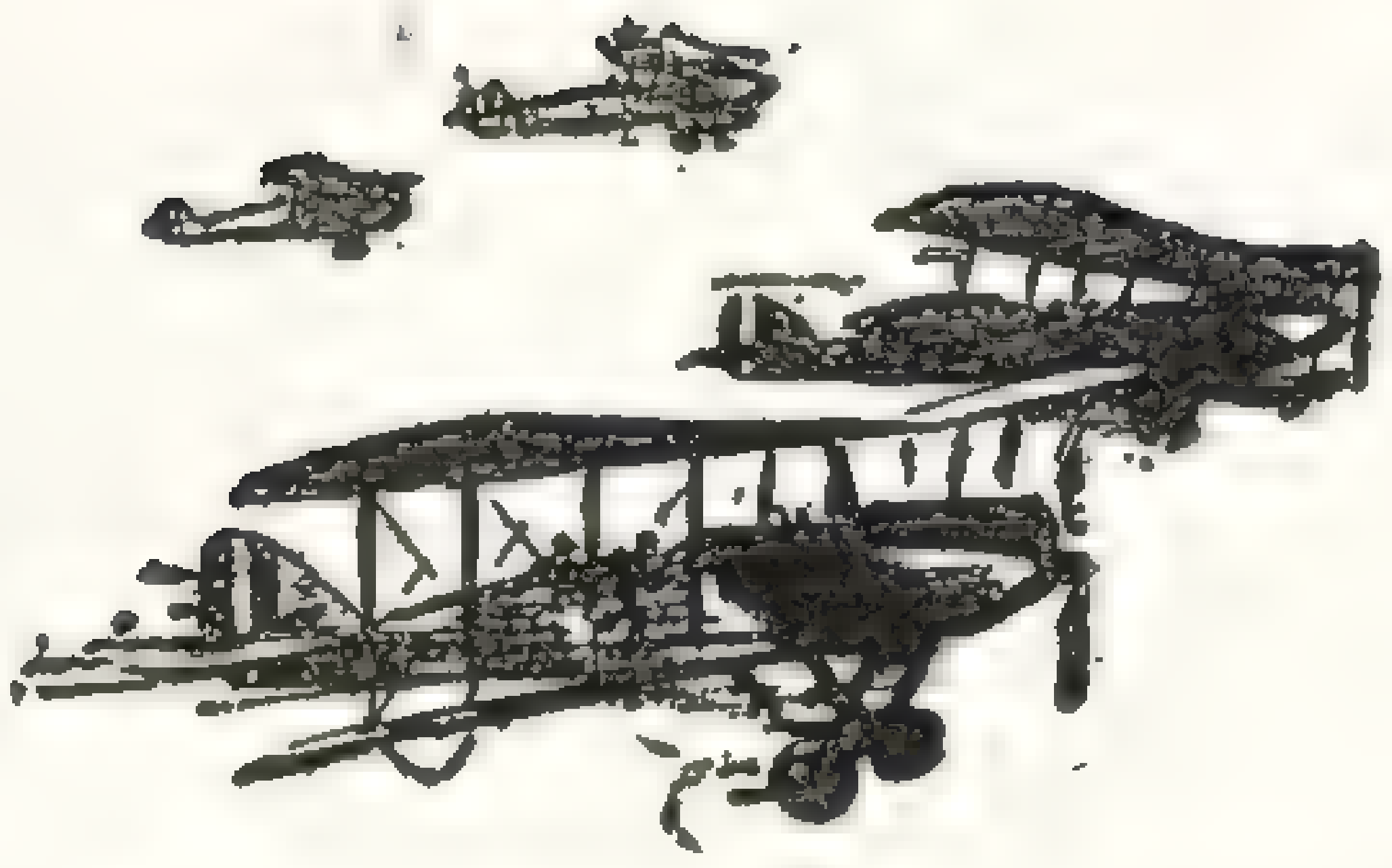
"The devil!"

"Yeah." The sheriff stripped the foil from another cigar. "I guess, Steele, we understand each other."

He winked a bit grimly.

"Go to it!" John said under his breath.

TO BE CONTINUED



THEY MISTOOK MY PROFESSION

By DICK GRACE

"COME on. Please take me up."

"Yes—do! He's wanted to go with you for months."

I was just about to swing into the rear cockpit when the words greeted me. I scowled. This same couple had been dogging my footsteps all day, endeavoring to have me give just one ride to the anemic looking individual who was so closely guarded by his wife.

It was not that I was unwilling to oblige them, but I had other and more important things to do than to carry passengers on this day. I was going to try to drop from a plane in a parachute and land on the top of another airplane.

"There are lots of pilots who would carry you on a flight. Please get one of them."

"But my husband wants to go with you," begged the woman.

With a sigh of resignation, I acquiesced. It would save time and argument if I gave the persistent visitors their wish. So I climbed out of the rear seat and helped the gray haired passenger into the front cockpit.

"How's your health? Is your heart all right?" I questioned, as I leaned over him and helped to buckle the safety belt.

"Oh, yes; my heart is perfect."

"And you're not going up to cure deafness?" I pursued, looking for a motive for such persistence.

"I can hear as well as you," he countered.

Satisfied, I crawled back into the rear pit and strapped myself in. Then the blocks were removed and we took off.

I was bored. Long ago, when I had first started to specialize in the different branches of stunt work, I had left passenger work to my other pilots and to the different companies on the field. Passenger work was extremely uninteresting, almost as much so as patrol or ferry duty. Yet this was but one flight, and it would soon be over. I yawned.

Apparently my passenger felt the same way about it, for although he professed this to be his first venture into the air, he sat quite unperturbed. He did not glance in any direction, did not attempt to look over the side. Such nonchalance irked me a little after his impatience for the ride. But then, I reasoned, he was just a real air minded man, undoubtedly would have made a good flyer.

We were now at an altitude of twenty-five hundred feet. Five hundred more, and I would turn fieldward and land. So I stuck the nose up and watched the hand of the meter travel toward the three mark.

Then it was that I noticed my passenger acting queerly. His head was low in the pit, and he seemed to be struggling, as if to free himself of the belt.

Curiously I watched. He had evidently succeeded in unfastening the metal safety clasp, for his hands were on the leather that bound the seat, and he was trying to assume a standing posture.

With a mixture of feelings, I cut the motor and yelled to him to sit down; but if he heard me he paid not the slightest attention. He kept his face to the front and continued to rise. Now he had his hands on the upper wing, and one foot was poised on the edge of the fuselage.

By this time my heart was beating fast. I knew why he had been so anxious for me to take him up; this was a suicide pact between him and the woman. A clever idea! Some people would believe that my passenger had deliberately jumped out, but many of them would assume that he had fallen from the plane. No one could absolutely be sure of the fact either way.

Putting on full power, I suddenly brought the ship into a stall. The quickness of the stunt toppled the man back into the seat. Then I too unbuckled my belt and, leaning over, grasped the fellow by the shoulder. Slowly he turned to face me, and if I ever had a spinal chill, I got one then.

The man was not trying suicide for any of the reasons which I had imagined in those brief seconds. He did not know what he was doing. I stared into the face of a maniac. His eyes were dully glazed and they glared at me like no eyes I had ever seen before. His features twisted into one unbelievable and terrifying expression after another. Froth lathered from his mouth and flecks of it were wafted away in the wind of the prop stream.

I did not know what to do; I sat frozen to the controls. And the passenger, a maniac, again stood up in the seat. His foot sought the leather that bound the pit; his hands had freed themselves from the rear tips of the upper wing; even they were over the side of the ship, ready for the jump. His body was inclining to the outer edges of the fuselage.

I glanced hastily below. We were directly above one of the larger western cities. The body would hurl itself into the midst of crowded streets from a height of three thousand feet.

I called again to him, but he gave me no heed whatsoever. The controls could not possibly be left alone. It was out of the question to think of fighting him with the ship whirling groundward.

I looked desperately about me. I knew that he was about to take the spring which would plunge him to his death and perhaps carry others along with him.

The fire extinguisher! The old safeguard against students who froze controls. I grabbed it and held it firmly by the handle. For just one second the controls were left to themselves as I raised on one knee in the seat.

Poising the instrument high above my head, I waited until he was standing perfectly still, ready to make the jump. Then I swung, not easily, but with all the force at my command. There was just the faintest suggestion of a thud as the fire extinguisher came into contact with the leather helmet. The body toppled over in the seat and disappeared from view. Evidently it had fallen on the floor of the cockpit.

A thrust forward on the stick put the ship into a vicious dive. I would get back to earth before he awakened from the blow, if possible.

I landed, taxied to the line and cut the switch.

Then to a mechanic:

"Order an ambulance. The passenger went crazy, and I had to knock him out."

I hunted the woman, told her of her husband's attempt to take his life and she—broke down in tears!

"We both thought," she sobbed, "that maybe a flight would in some way cure those fits."

I looked at her in astonishment.

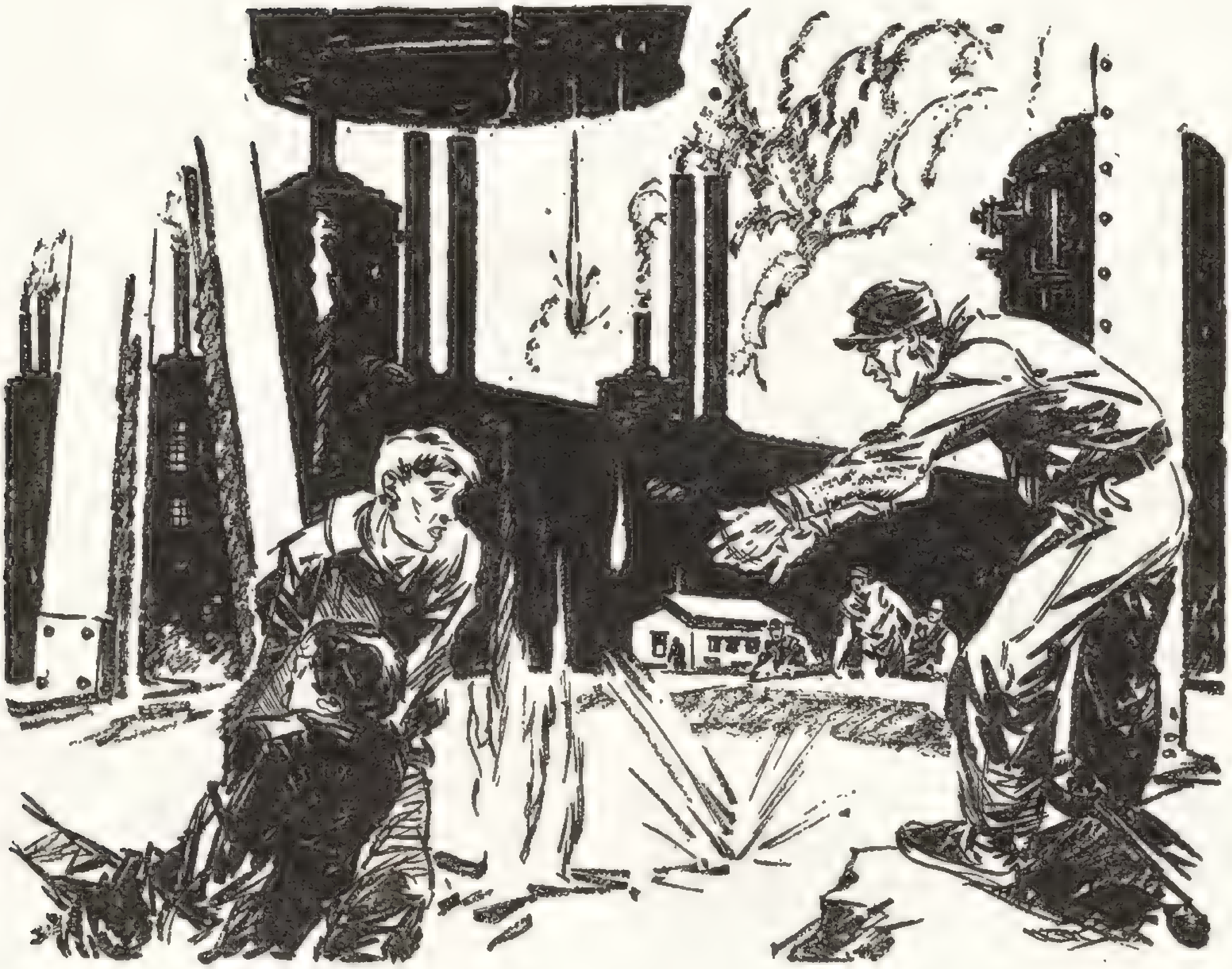
"My dear madam," I said, when I at last recovered the power of speech, "this is the first time that I have been mistaken for an insanity cure."

I started to walk toward the hangar, but turned to say to her as an afterthought:

"But perhaps you were right. One more flight, and your husband's troubles would no doubt be all over."

STEEL BENT

By EDMUND M. LITTELL



A Minister's Son Who Proved Himself in the Inferno of the Blast Furnaces

STEEL making is no job for a minister's son. Jock Campbell said so, Jock Campbell, the giant of a man who, as open hearth superintendent of Midwest Steel, knew whereof he spoke. It is a rough, hard life, to say nothing of its danger. There are moments, not a few of them, when the men who nurse the fires of hell break out into language that belongs in such a region. He neglected to add that his own great voice was not beyond expressing itself somewhat forcefully at times. There are always extenuating circumstances, as when men go bad or when steel breaks loose.

"And what's more, you ain't got your growth yet," he concluded, his deep voice rumbling up out of his barrel of a chest with all the finality of a last trump. "No, you stick to your paper route. Maybe next year—"

This was on a Sunday evening, and big Jock Campbell was sitting on his front porch in one of those rare moments of relaxation that is given a man who has tonnage to get out. Church attendance, he had explained to his neighbor, the Reverend Mr. Cox, was not possible for him. He had no time. Steel was his job, seven days a week and not a few of its nights besides. But if there was anything he could do—

"There is," the Reverend Mr. Cox had said, with worry written upon his broad white brow. He was fairly tall himself, almost six feet; but he looked like a sapling beside the tree trunk bulk of Jock. "Gerald is very fond of you, very fond indeed. He even takes the liberty of calling you by your first name—in the privacy of our home, of course—and no amount of admonition will correct him. He— Does his calling upon you grow embarrassing?"

"I should say not," rumbled Jock, who had no children of his own. "He's a good kid. He can come around any time he wants to."

"Thank you. What I should like to ask, then, is this: He seems to be bent upon going into the mill. He says he wants to be a steel man. Will you try to discourage him in that? Not that I hold any prejudice against steel making as a profession, or you as his friend," he hastened to add. "On the contrary. But Gerald is so young, only eighteen. He lost a year in school due to our last change of residence, and he has a year of high school ahead of him, with college to follow if God is willing; and if he should go into the mill now I'm very much afraid that he would be unwilling to go on with his education."

"Sure; glad to," said the big man whose schooling had stopped in the middle of his 'teens. "Kids do get kind of restless, don't they?"

"And not a little impatient with the counsel of their parents sometimes," added the Reverend Mr. Cox with a sad smile. "That is why I am making this request of you. A word or two dropped at the proper moment— Thank you. You're very kind."

That had been some weeks ago, and Jock had dropped the word or two as occasion offered. Successfully, too, he had thought, for the boy's suggestions had stopped. But now high school had closed for the summer a short time before and here he was, sitting on the porch rail and receiving Jock's words with a grin. He was almost as tall as his father—unusually tall for a boy of his age. And he was not fully developed yet; he needed a lot more flesh on him. He was all elbows and feet and hands, which had inspired Jock's concluding remark. And that grin—it was positively impertinent. So was his reply.

"Aw, hell," he said, his grin wider than ever, "that's what you've been telling me for weeks. I know all the damn' words they use out there—"

"And you'll not be using 'em here," Jock ruled, sternly, to forestall a tendency of his own lips to twitch.

He knew the kid was not thinking evil, but was only conveying his familiarity with the language used by strong men in moments of stress, but—

"There is a time and a place for that kind of talk, and it ain't here."

"No—" still grinning impishly and tossing his head to free one eye of a lock of tow colored hair— "the time to use 'em is when you're in trouble. With an off heat or—"

Jock sat up in his chair and summoned an ominous frown. That was mill language, known only to those who had been there and seen and heard.

"What do you know about off heats?" he rumbled. "You been on the mill?"

"Sure; all over it," said the youngster, refusing to quail before the frown that had stopped many a huskier man. "You ought to've heard Red Sullivan the other night when he got a sticker."

"A sticker? Jerry, you're kiddin' me. I was there that night."

"Don't I know it! I was hiding behind the water tank. I thought you never would go away and let me go home. That floor certainly did get hard before you went away."

Jock's frown deepened. It had to, else he would have burst into a roar of laughter. He was thinking of a promise made and planning an interview with the chief of the plant police when the impertinent lad went on:

"That wire fence is all right, Jo—Mr. Campbell, but if you walk along the main line tracks you'll find an awful nice hole."

"H-m-m!" And a great hand lifted to Jock's face in a gesture that looked thoughtful and served as a cover for twitching lips.

Then the boy sobered and put an honest question—

"What's to prevent me from going out and getting a job and not saying anything about it?" he asked.

"Not a thing," said Jock slowly. "Not a thing, except your promise that you won't. Your father don't like the idea, lad, and I don't know but what he's right. You ain't husky enough yet. Maybe next year—"

Jerry shook his head.

"But I haven't promised," he said.

Jock's eyes narrowed. There was no mistaking the boy's purpose; but he was forgetting that Jock Campbell's word was law at the timekeeper's gate.

"All right." Jock grinned back at him. "If you won't make any promises—try and get in."

A laugh from Jerry Cox and he was gone. And Jock watched him cross the two lawns that separated their houses and chuckled. The kid was honest, anyhow. Maybe he would make a good steel man some day. If this hankering of his were not just one of those schoolboy wishes. In the meantime—

"THERE'LL be a kid coming around here," he said to the employment manager the next morning. "Gerald Cox, the Reverend's boy. He'll be wanting a job, but we can get along without him."

The employment manager nodded, and that was that. Until several days later, when Jock burst into the stock house to demand the why-for of the delay in supplying certain invaluable sacks of recarburizer. There, working at a high desk in one corner of the little room, was the gangling, tow headed youth whom he had last seen running across a lawn.

"Jerry!" The great voice with which he had first had his say to a negligent stock house boss rumbled across the room and jerked the bent head erect. "Come here!"

The boy slid down from his stool and crossed the floor. Grinning! That was courage, coming as it did after a bawling out into which Jock had put a vigor intended for his ears too.

"What are you doing here?"

"Working," said Jerry Cox, as innocent as a lamb. "It isn't exactly the kind of a job I wanted, but—"

"How'd you get in?"

"Through the timekeeper's gate." His lips twitched and his brown eyes twinkled. "My name's Bill Duffy," he added.

That meant that the call Jock was planning to make upon an employment manager was not necessary, but—

"Against my orders," he rumbled.

"Oh, no," said Jerry quickly. "You didn't tell me to stay out. You dared me to get in."

He was right, and Jock knew it. And what was more, he had got in. Which made the matter of maintaining his dignity as a mighty superintendent rather difficult.

"Come with me," he ordered.

Then the boy's valor disappeared. His brown eyes clouded; he begged in a husky voice:

"Aw, listen, Mr. Campbell. Don't make me quit. I'm doing my work—ain't I?"—to the amazed stock house boss. "I know I played a trick, but—"

"Come along."

He did, silently. He did not even wait to take up his cap. He stumbled out behind Jock like a dog that is going to punishment, and when Jock turned around and saw his eyes—

"Now look here, Jerry."

It was hard to keep his voice crisp in the light of what he saw; it softened in spite of himself.

"It ain't that I don't want you here; it's because your father asked me not to take you in."

"I know that. He thinks I won't go back to school if I get started here. But I will, and to college, too. I told 'em at the gate that I wanted a summer job, and—" he stopped, and his toe kicked at the cinders that covered the yard— "how can I get to study metallurgy if I don't earn some money? Has a preacher ever got enough?"

"H-m-m! Does your father know you're here?"

"No; not yet. I was going to tell him tonight." The boy looked up with another of his grins. "I wasn't real sure I could get in."

Then Jock surrendered. There was no doubting Jerry's determination to get into steel. He might even stick to his determination to go on with it. A heavy hand dropped gently upon the bony shoulder.

"Well, I guess there's no stopping you, is there?"

Jerry's lips tightened and he shook his head.

"And you don't care about your office job?"

Another shake, with the brown eyes brightening hopefully.

"Want to go to work on the open hearth?"

"Yes!" One word, but a heartful of earnestness was in it.

"Third helper? Twelve hours a day? Seven days a week? Double turn twice a month?"

Nod, nod, nod; with each pause between the questions. Lips tightly closed and unwavering certainty in each nod.

"All right. But not today." Quickly, to forestall the burst of gratitude that was showing in his face. "Tomorrow. With a time card that's got your own name on it. After a talk with your father. How about it?"

There was no question as to how. It was done. Jerry darted into the stock house office, fired himself and got his cap, then streaked away across the yard with such a light in his face that Jock, watching his feet and knees trying to work together, felt just a little bit guilty. For his offer of a job as third helper had been made with malice aforethought. Always provided, he had thought a moment before; always provided the kid's desire to go into steel was strong enough to conquer the troubles steel would have for him.

"There's a kid," he said to Red Sullivan after he had explained matters to the stock house boss and the employment manager, "that's a neighbor of mine. Jerry Cox—know him?"

Red Sullivan, a lean, scrawny man who had been rendered down to skin and bone by the fires he served, was lounging on the high backed wooden bench which, with three lockers and a bathtub sized steel water tank, was the club room and resting place of the crew. He lifted a quick glance to his boss, then looked away down the long, street wide floor that stretched away beneath its shadowing roof. He was first helper, boss of No. 2 Furnace, and he had found good reasons for taking a shine to the kid during those surreptitious visits of his; but he was not sure just how far to go in his admission. He shifted uneasily on his bench and looked across the littered floor.

There was his furnace, its eighty-foot front broken by three heavy brick doors, each of them with a peephole eye through which the light of his inferno flickered. There was something of mirth in their glint, similar in a way to the twinkle he had caught in Jock's. He decided to admit—a little.

"Yeah," he said. "I know him," and bent his head ostensibly to fumble with the blue glasses that nested in his shock of red hair.

"I thought so." Jock chuckled. "How much?"

"Well, he seems to be kinda nuts about this steel making—heaven help him! The questions he asks—"

"All right, you get him. He's going to be a kind of assistant third helper."

"Yeah?" That was a new sort of job in Red's experience. Third helpers, good ones, generally worked alone, but—"If he ain't any better'n the one I got, maybe two or three more wouldn't hurt none."

"So I thought," said the big man whose keen eye seldom missed a weak spot. "And if he gets a little more than half the work and decides to lay off, it'll suit his father and me fine."

"Oh. Give him a bellyful, eh? Well, he won't get it; he'll take it," Red prophesied with a laugh, and Jock might have given thought to those words except that he was thinking of another job to be done—a visit with the Reverend.

That kid was certainly using up a lot of his valuable time.

"YES, he has told us all about it," said Jerry's father that evening.

His mother added somewhat ruefully—

"And he's as excited about it as though he were going to a picnic."

"Apparently he is quite determined," said his father.

"Apparently," chuckled Jock. "But there's just one thing—this is one picnic he ain't been to yet." At which both parents, reading some sly meaning into his voice, looked questions at him. "Maybe he'll find out it ain't exactly digging in a rose garden, this job."

"Will he be hurt?" from a suddenly anxious mother.

"Oh, no," Jock reassured her. "Except his hands. A few blisters, likely—if he sticks that long."

"You mean—" the Reverend Mr. Cox paused, then smiled. "I understand," he said. "Too much cake."

"Well, call it that if you want to," said Jock.

"Splendid. I believe that will do it, Mr. Campbell." A grateful hand reached out. "We're mightily indebted to you, sir."

Wise grown-ups. In their years they thought they were managing an over-determined boy. And Jock persisted in the thought the next morning, when he found Jerry waiting for him, as impatient as a pup that awaits the tossing of a stick.

"Half hour early, eh?"

A mile from their quiet, tree shaded street to where the trolley stopped on the town side of the main line tracks, another mile through the timekeeper's gate and along the cinder covered yard where a column of train shed buildings stood like a halted parade—and thirty minutes early! Untasted cake, was Jock's thought as he led him to No. 2 Furnace, but what he said was—

"You're going to work for Red Sullivan."

"Am I? For Red? Gosh!" And into Jerry's eyes came a light that said, "This is too good to be true."

"And it'll be work, too, understand?" rumbled Jock Campbell, plotter. "In this place I'm your boss, not your neighbor. No shenanigans."

"Yes, sir," breathed the newest hand, and Jock left him there.

But he did not forget him, despite the fact that he was a busy man. He had a half-mile building to oversee, an enormous place full of furnaces and men and materials and machines. Yet there were not a few moments when he just happened to be on the pouring floor not so very far from No. 2.

It is not unlike a wide boulevard, that pouring floor; a boulevard of hard packed earth. Along its outer side a black wall rises sheer to meet the roof, so high overhead that it might be sky, and hanging to that wall, some ten feet above the ground, is a narrow walk—the teeming platform. The inner border of the boulevard is different. There a row of ten flat roofed brick houses aligns itself down the center of the building, each broad fronted house with an oddly sloping balcony across its front at second floor height—the furnaces.

The slope of those railed balconies is downward from each side toward the middle, and stops just short of a long protruding gutter—the tapping spout. The high points of the balconies coincide in each case with a passageway that leads back between the furnaces to the elevated charging floor, and from these high points a steep flight of stairs drops down to the pouring floor. And beneath each tapping spout, framed by the steel stairs and back dropped by the blank first story wall of the furnace, is a cinder pit.

Now, cinder pits are necessary evils. No open hearth furnace can get along without one. They are circular holes in the ground some thirty feet in diameter and of various depths around three feet; and on opposite sides of them, set at right angles to the furnace, are two massive steel castings which at tapping time support a huge ladle in much the same fashion that a teapot is held above an alcohol lamp. These pits then are beneath the ladles, acting as saucers. They catch the inevitable overflow that comes after a hundred tons of molten steel has belched out of the furnace, down the tapping spout and into the waiting ladle.

It is not steel that boils up over the ladle's brim and trickles down into the cinder pit; it is slag, the lava that men make when they treat tons of the earth's crust with typhoons of fire in those second story hells. The steel stays in the ladle, the slag boils over, and after the ladle has been swung away by the great crane that bridges the floor high overhead, while the steel is being teemed from it into the waiting train of ingot molds that stands beneath the edge of the teeming platform, the cinder pits are cleaned out—by third helpers.

A simple job, cleaning out a cinder pit. It does not require much equipment. Only shoes with two inch soles on them, so that you can walk on the still hot slag without too much discomfort, a pick and a shovel. And a certain something that may or may not be present, that is never visible, but which—in a cinder pit—always makes itself apparent. In mill parlance that something is known as guts.

Which quite possibly accounted for Jock's forgetting other matters when late that afternoon he just happened to espy his newest employee. He looked pretty small over there. Even big Jock, standing on the teeming platform for the ostensible purpose of inspecting a newly tapped heat, was dwarfed to midget size by the immensity of the place. But Gerald was slogging away like a giant. His companion, Jock noted, was acting more like a straw boss than a third helper. He was giving advice apparently, leaning on his pick and pointing. He was using his mouth instead of his muscle. But Jerry was driving his pick down as though there were solid gold instead of sulphur fumes in that hardening stuff, then tossing his pick aside and scooping like fury.

"Great stuff," said Jock Campbell, superintendent. "If we only had a lot more like him—"

"Sure," said Jock Campbell, plotter. "He's going to be so full of cake before night that he'll have permanent indigestion."

"Yes," retorted Jock Campbell, neighbor, "but, for Pete's sake, don't let him kill himself eating it." Whereupon the teeming of a heat was forgotten and a message was delivered to Red Sullivan.

"He's got to have enough pep left to get home on, anyhow," growled Jock Campbell, neighbor. "We don't want to have to use the ambulance."

"All right," said Red Sullivan with a knowing grin. "Just you leave him to me."

And it was Jock Campbell, neighbor, who called at the parsonage that evening. More time spent over an infernal kid.

"He's getting his cake with a vengeance, isn't he?" was the greeting from Reverend Mr. Cox. There was mild accusation in his eye.

"He was completely exhausted," Jerry's mother moaned. "We waited supper for him, but he didn't touch it. And the way he dragged himself upstairs—" she caught her breath. "He's sound asleep now. I just looked in."

"Well," said Jock, "he worked pretty hard. Pretty hard. Maybe you'd better not wake him in the morning," he suggested.

"But he has an alarm clock," said his mother.

"Then shut it off. Dollars to doughnuts he wouldn't hear it anyway."

THE NEXT morning there was no Jerry Cox. But at noon there was, an angry, hot eyed youth who exploded such a storm of abuse as Jock had not received in many a day.

"What do you think I am—a baby?" he wanted to know in a voice that shook. "I asked you for a job. I don't want a nurse!"

Jock was embarrassed. He had thought to do a kindness. In fact, his suggestion had amounted to disloyalty to Jerry's parents, for he knew there is nothing like sleep to restore complete exhaustion. And he would have said so, except that Jerry was pressing on.

"Do you think I'm crazy about being kidded to death? How'd you like to have a gang laughing at you for a quitter? You gave me a job, didn't you? Well, you let me work at it!"

His brown eyes were ablaze, his chin quivered, and Jock was frightened. Those signs meant tears unless he was mistaken, and he fled to the safety of his office cubicle, tossing a "Come here!" over his shoulder. Then, with the door closed upon them, the shrewd old giant who knew men and suspected that boys were not much different took the only stand that could be taken. He stormed.

"Who do you think you are?" he rumbled, and Jerry's outburst stopped. It had to; there was no room for another voice when big Jock's cut loose. "Bawling me out like I was one o' your hired hands. I won't stand for it! Of course I told 'em to let you sleep. You needed it and you know it. And if I tell you to stand on your head in the middle of a furnace, I expect you to do it. I'm boss around here, and don't you forget it. Don't want a nurse, eh? Think you ain't a baby? Well, act like a man, then. And when you go home you square yourself for the things you said to your folks. Now, get out o' here. Get back to your furnace and do your job. And if I hear any more back talk from you—get your time!"

No reply from Jerry. His mouth, which had dropped open when Jock began, closed slowly—above a chin that no longer quivered. For a long moment he stood there looking thoughtful, then his lips tightened; he opened the door and backed out. But before he slammed it between them Jock caught the flash of teeth bared in a grin of understanding. It seemed to linger there long after the sound of running footsteps died away, and Jock chuckled his satisfaction, while an assistant third helper five hours late was sliding to a halt before the wooden bench on which lounged the crew of No. 2 Furnace.

There is a lot of lounging in steel. There has to be, or no man could stand it. They could not work like galley slaves except for those chances to rest like trail-weary dogs, and that was what they were doing when Jerry stopped before them. They had just finished making bottom—heaving dolomite by the shovelful through doors that yawned incandescently, filling up the holes that a recently tapped heat of steel had eaten in the floor lining of their furnace. Scoop, walk up into the dazzling blast that is hotter than any ten Saharas, heave a load into the tub sized pock marks that are visible only through the screen of blue lenses, then do it again and again and again. Sweat flows like water, muscles turn flaccid and tempers change accordingly. And the three men who greeted Jerry reacted, each after his own fashion.

Red Sullivan, being a veteran and having good reason to suspect Jock's hand in the tardiness, gave him a grinning good morning. Fat Martin, the heat toughened second helper whose sweating never seemed to reduce his weight, cackled and volunteered the opinion that a feller wouldn't never get to be no millionaire keepin' them kinda hours. And Alex Wells, the third helper . . .

"I thought all the time you knew about him," Red said to Jock in telling about it afterward. "You was chucklin' to yourself all the time."

"No," said Jock with a dawning comprehension and a somewhat rueful smile, "I didn't."

Alex Wells, it seemed, was quite well known to Jerry. He was one of those long faced, wide mouthed young men who walked and talked with a swagger, and they had been schoolmates of a sort. Red suspected on the night of Jerry's first surreptitious visit that Jerry hated Alex cordially; it had shown in his eyes when Alex had introduced him that night as "one of the kids I used to know in high school". But Jerry had said nothing. He had simply turned his back on Alex and devoted himself to Red, making a hit then and there. Then when Jerry came to work the day before Alex began to high hat him all over the place.

"Acted like he was boss o' the whole shebang instead of a third helper—an' a damn' poor one at that," said Red.

Jerry stood it for awhile, then he lashed out. Into the middle of some of Alex's big mouthed talk about its being no job for a kid he inserted:

"Then why are they hiring me to help you? I didn't notice any other third helper around the place that needed an assistant."

After which he had thrown himself into the work with the fervor Jock had noticed.

"And it wasn't hard to beat him workin', either," said Red. "'Specially when Alex thinks the best tool for diggin' out cinder is his tongue."

That was the Alex Wells, worn down by bottom making, who looked up at a Jerry five hours late, pulled down the corners of his wide mouth and said—

"Well, you did come back, didn't you?"

Jerry had been expecting something like that; it was plain to be seen. He had given Red and Fat only the hastiest of apologetic grins, then fixed his gaze defiantly upon Alex. And the words had scarcely been spoken when Jerry was upon him.

But Red was almost as quick.

"Not that I wanted to," he told Jock. "I'd rather see a good fight than eat, and I'll bet Jerry could ha' licked the tar out of him, smaller than him as he is. But—" he shrugged, and Jock nodded his approval—"I grabbed him by the arm and pulled him off. Told him to keep his shirt on, that there was a lot o' cinder waitin' an' he could go down an' fight that."

And Jerry had gone. But not until he had set himself in front of Alex and delivered himself of a speech.

"Yes, I came back," he snapped. "And I'll keep on coming back. I'll do twice as much work as you do, too, just like I did yesterday, and any time you want to shoot off that big mouth of yours—"

"Well, what if I do?" drawled Alex Wells, grinning superciliously.

"I'll shut it for you," said Jerry. "You've had one coming for two years now, you high school grandstander, and you'll get it!" Whereupon he took his pick and shovel and stamped across the floor to disappear through the passageway, every step an oath. Alex was somewhat older than Jerry and a little taller, better muscled in a wiry sort of way; but he sat there as though he knew he was the better man, grinning at Jerry's back.

"And you told me to hold him down," Red finished with a chuckle, "when that kid's so full of pep and vinegar he's like a charge o' dynamite! Mark my words, there's goin' to be a fight around here, and the longer Alex struts around the worse it's goin' to be."

"M-m-m!" rumbled Jock. Quite a plotter he was! Sticking a kid into such a situation—why, he'd *have* to whip the job. But what he said aloud was, "No wonder he bawled me out. And I just got through telling him to act like a man and not like a baby. Guess I'll have a little talk with them."

He did, in the cinderpit where they were finishing up a job. With Alex prompt to find a seat while Jerry stood, leaning on his shovel and with sweat washing streaks down his dust covered face.

STEEL, Jock conveyed, is a job of work, not a training place for fighters. It calls for every ounce of strength a man has, and if they wanted to get anywhere—"I'm going to," from Jerry—they had to buckle into it. In that case they might be equal to steel. Otherwise they'd be whipped. No man was ever superior to steel. If they made good, they'd always have jobs and constantly better ones. If they didn't, out they'd go.

"And there's one thing that don't go in this place—fighting. If you can't work together, quit. Get that?"

They did, Alex with one of his superior grins in the direction of Jerry, who was nodding soberly—and suddenly asking an impertinent question:

"Want to save some money?" with a grin. "Then get rid of this big mouth. He isn't worth a cent."

"That," said Jock Campbell, superintendent, "doesn't happen to be your business. But I'll tell you this, both of you. No. 2 Furnace is the only one in the plant that's got two third helpers, and that won't last forever," with which he turned on his heel and strode away lest he ruin the effect of a lecture by laughing.

Youngsters are hard to handle. They are undisciplined and fiery, some of them. But many a lad had come out of the local high school and climbed to worthwhile jobs in Midwest Steel by way of the cinder pits; it paid to handle them. So from then on the keen eyes of the grizzled steel man turned more often than ever upon No. 2.

They witnessed the slow progress of a tow headed youngster in the business of making himself. It could not have been easy. He must have had sore muscles during those long days; the palms of his hands must have shuddered at the thought of touching a pick or a shovel handle. But he did it, in a grim lipped silence that shouted his determination aloud for any one to hear.

Alex was his constant—and unchanging—companion. For Alex worked too. Jock's message had not escaped him. But he worked with a difference. He was satisfied with himself. Every word he spoke and every attitude he struck told of it. He did just enough work to get by, hence was always rested enough to use his mouth.

"Saw Bill Carnahan the other day," was one of his remarks. "He told me I was crazy to stick to this job. But I just laughed. He couldn't stand the gaff, remember?"

"Where's Jock these days? Haven't seen him around much. Main office, eh? Well, I guess we can get along without him."

While Jerry sprawled, half sitting, half lying, on the wooden bench, his feet thrust straight out before him, his hands inert in his lap, and let his strength rebuild itself. He was concentrating upon the whipping of a job; he had no ears for words. Except occasionally, when Red caught a flash in his fatigue dulled eyes or saw teeth exposed in what might have been a grin, but what reminded him of the fang baring grimace of a much pestered dog—until a day when Jerry rolled his head around against the back of the bench and addressed a question to Red.

"Why do you charge so much limestone?" he asked. "It only makes that much more slag."

Of course it was Alex who volunteered a reply.

"That's easy," he announced in his superior way. "If you didn't your heat would—"

By that time Jerry had rolled his head around to face him.

"You still here?" he drawled, and grinned. "I thought you had left long ago."

The first sign, and what a sign. Red was tempted to laugh aloud, but checked it. Instead he supplied a rough outline of the importance of limestone as a blanket for the bath, a sponge for steel's impurities. Then Jerry pulled in his feet and stood up.

"Now, Mr. Wells, you were saying?"

Something had happened to Jerry. He had more than whipped his half of a job, and in the doing of it had acquired something more than the muscle that now filled in the cavities around the bony places. His voice was deeper, his face had lost some of its youthful look, he carried himself with an assurance that was impressive—and Alex was aware of it. He put on one of his patronizing grins, but his eyes fell before the steady gaze of a Jerry who was no longer "one of the kids I used to know at school". He shifted on the bench and mumbled:

"Nothing. Red told you."

"And Red will keep on telling me," said Jerry evenly. "Don't forget that. The only time I want to hear from you after this is when I ask you a question. You thought you had me whipped that day when you knocked me out in front of a crowd, but you were wrong. Just keep your tongue in your mouth from now on."

Another superior contortion from Alex, who drew the corners of his mouth down.

"Bright talk!" was the best he could do, and Red was altogether delighted.

He reported it all to Jock, adding his recommendation that the crew of No. 2 be reduced to a normal personnel of three —"unless you want to see Alex take a beatin'."

But Jock, forgetting his plot, was not so sure about that. Jerry might not be equal to the whole job just yet, and Alex had his value. Perhaps, too, Jerry would have on Alex the same effect that Alex had produced on him. It might result in two good men for steel.

"No, let's leave 'em alone for awhile. You might bear down on Jerry a little more, though."

"Sure. But I won't promise to stop this next fight, and there's one on the way, I know. I can see it in Jerry's eyes. Tell you what I'll do. I'll promote him. Maybe that'll take his mind off his fists."

And the manner of his doing it met with Jock's entire approval. He waited until they were all sitting around waiting for the bath to work down to tapping condition, then addressed himself to Jerry—

"Want to try some ladle additions?"

Now, making ladle additions is not hard work. Compared to slogging cinder or making bottom it is a cinch. It is even easier than making furnace additions, but there is a difference. Instead of standing before a yawning furnace door and shooting your ferro-manganese into a lake of molten steel, you stand on the sloping balcony on the tapping side of the furnace and heave it by the shovelful into the ladle while the heat is being tapped.

There is a trick about it. In the first place you have to shoot it quite a distance. The heat from the flaming, spitting cataract that sizzles down the tapping spout and plunges twenty feet into the ladle is something to keep away from. Then you have to heave your loads at a very small target—the exact spot where the plunging torrent of metal strikes the rising pool inside the ladle. Otherwise your ferro wouldn't be thoroughly mixed and dissolved. Such a job requires accuracy and implies trained muscles. Heretofore it had always been done by Red and Fat, so to Jerry it was a compliment.

"Why, yes," he said, trying hard not to show his pleasure. "If you think I can do it," he added with proper modesty, and Alex took his cue.

"I don't know," was his volunteered opinion, his brows drawn down like a judge. "I don't believe he can. Better let me do it."

There was Red's chance, the one he had hoped for.

"What for?" he drawled. "That's a third helper's job, if he's good. We don't give it to assistants."

And once more Alex Wells had no comeback. Not a verbal one, that is. He produced a silent sneer, but thereafter lapsed into darksome silence while Jerry hustled back and forth, weighing and piling the fist sized rocks of ferro. And be it said to Jerry's credit, not a single crow came out of him, verbal or otherwise, in spite of all the excuses he had for crowing.

And about what followed there have been some doubts expressed. Some claim that Jerry struck Alex on purpose, some claim that it was accidental. Red, the only one who saw it all, maintains that such talk is to no purpose. Alex had no business to interfere at such a time. Ladle additions have to be made quickly; he knew that and should have kept his hands to himself. It was a case of jealousy, pure and simple.

"He thought he was It," Red put it, "and when he found he wasn't—well, what difference does it make? Ever see a swellhead that could laugh when he lost out? The thing to talk about is the way Jerry came across."

AT ANY rate, the heat was being tapped. Red had broken out the dried clay that stopped the tap hole and the torrent of molten steel was running down to cascade into the ladle, lighting up the building as though a thousand spotlights were there. On one side of the tapping spout Fat was recarburizing the heat with bags of coal dust which he shot into the stream; on the other side was Jerry, waiting for Red's signal to begin with the ferro. He was halfway down the slope, shovel in hand, and Red was standing behind and above him at the head of the stairs.

All three of them were equipped with blue glasses. They would have been blinded otherwise. Fat and Jerry wore theirs; Red was holding his before his eyes. And Alex was there too. He was standing beside Red, and his blue glasses could not conceal his doubt of Jerry's ability. The ladle was half full when Red gave his signal.

"Let her go!" he yelled above the spitting and popping of the stream, and Jerry went to work.

He scooped, swung around on his heel, and heaved with a mighty swing. Perhaps he was a little excited. He was not to be blamed for it. Perhaps he was not quite strong enough. At any rate only a part of the shovelful went into the ladle. It struck the brim, and some of it fell to the ground and some trickled on into the ladle. And there was where Alex jumped in.

Red heard a sound, something like a snort, and felt some one go past him. He lowered his glasses and saw Alex shuffling down the slope. Then he raised them again. The light was too bright. He saw two vague forms in momentary contact against the brilliance of light beyond them. Alex was trying to push Jerry away and take the shovel himself.

Jerry jerked back and with one shove pushed Alex away. It must have been a good shove, for Alex staggered a step or two—down the slope—slipped, perhaps on a bit of the ferro-manganese there, fell heavily, and rolled—over the edge of the balcony floor that stopped just short of the spout.

He fell to certain death. Red was sure of that. Dropping a-sprawl as he had done, he would strike the hard earthen side of the cinder pit and roll down, underneath the ladle. If he were conscious, the fall had injured him and he would be helpless. If he were unconscious it would be the same.

In a matter of moments the ladle would be full—that plunging stream was undammable—the slag would overflow and fill the cinderpit. Such were Red's thoughts during the frozen eternity of a split second. Then Jerry broke the spell. He dropped his shovel, slid down to the edge of the balcony floor, flung himself on his stomach and pushed himself backward over its edge.

Red took the steep flight of stairs in two jumps, yelling as he dropped.

"Y-i-i!" he howled, and the sound ripped across the noise of cascading steel. "Danger!" it meant. "Help!"

And as he struck the ground he saw three men streaking across the pouring floor toward the ladle. The teeming crew. They had been waiting on their shelf over there and had heard. But Red did not wait for them. He flung himself to the ground at the outer edge of the cinder pit and peered down into the darkness beneath the ladle. Fat appeared beside him. He had dropped down the other steps.

"Get around, other side," Red yelled, and Fat was gone.

Darkness down there, pitch black after the light of molten steel. No sign of Alex. He prepared to wriggle down into it when—

"Got him!"

It was Fat's voice on the inner side of the pit. Red scrambled to his feet and ran back. There was Jerry, clawing up from beneath the ladle dragging something behind him. A gob of hot slag splashed on the ground beside him.

"Drop him!" Red yelled. "Get out there quick!"

Jerry shifted the direction of his scramble, still tugging. More slag. Small gobs as yet, but more of them. *Plop!* A big one struck nearby. Jerry clawed more fiercely.

"Grab my feet!" Red yelled and, seizing Fat's hands, he lowered himself down the slope. A drop of slag thumped upon his back. A hand grabbed his pants leg. Fat heaved.

They moved up an inch. Three men being dragged by one.

"All together!" Fat yelled, and they soared up out of there.

The three other men had arrived.

Jerry's hand was caught in Alex's coat collar. There were a dozen smoking spots on his back. Alex was limp, unconscious. They carried him to safety as slag began to rain down, and Jerry followed, hanging on to Red. Jock arrived, breathless from a long run.

"Damn' fool!" Red panted. "What'd you go down there for? He's dead."

"No, he isn't."

Some one had thrown some water on Alex and he was moaning.

"Guess I busted something," said Jerry, and sat down suddenly.

"Look out!" It was Alex, screaming. "It's afire!" They splashed some more water on him and insanity left his staring eyes.

"Leg's busted," some one said. "Arm too." Alex was lying with a leg and an arm oddly twisted. He screamed again when they lifted him.

Jock cursed, ordering men about. They picked up Jerry too and started for the big door in the end of the building where the ambulance would appear. Red told Jock what had happened and he snarled at both of them. Unmitigated asses, he averred in language unrepeatable. Absolute, undefinable imitations of steel men—fighting on a balcony.

Alex came to with a howl as they lifted him into the ambulance, and Jock's voice stopped. They lifted Jerry in afterward and Alex saw him.

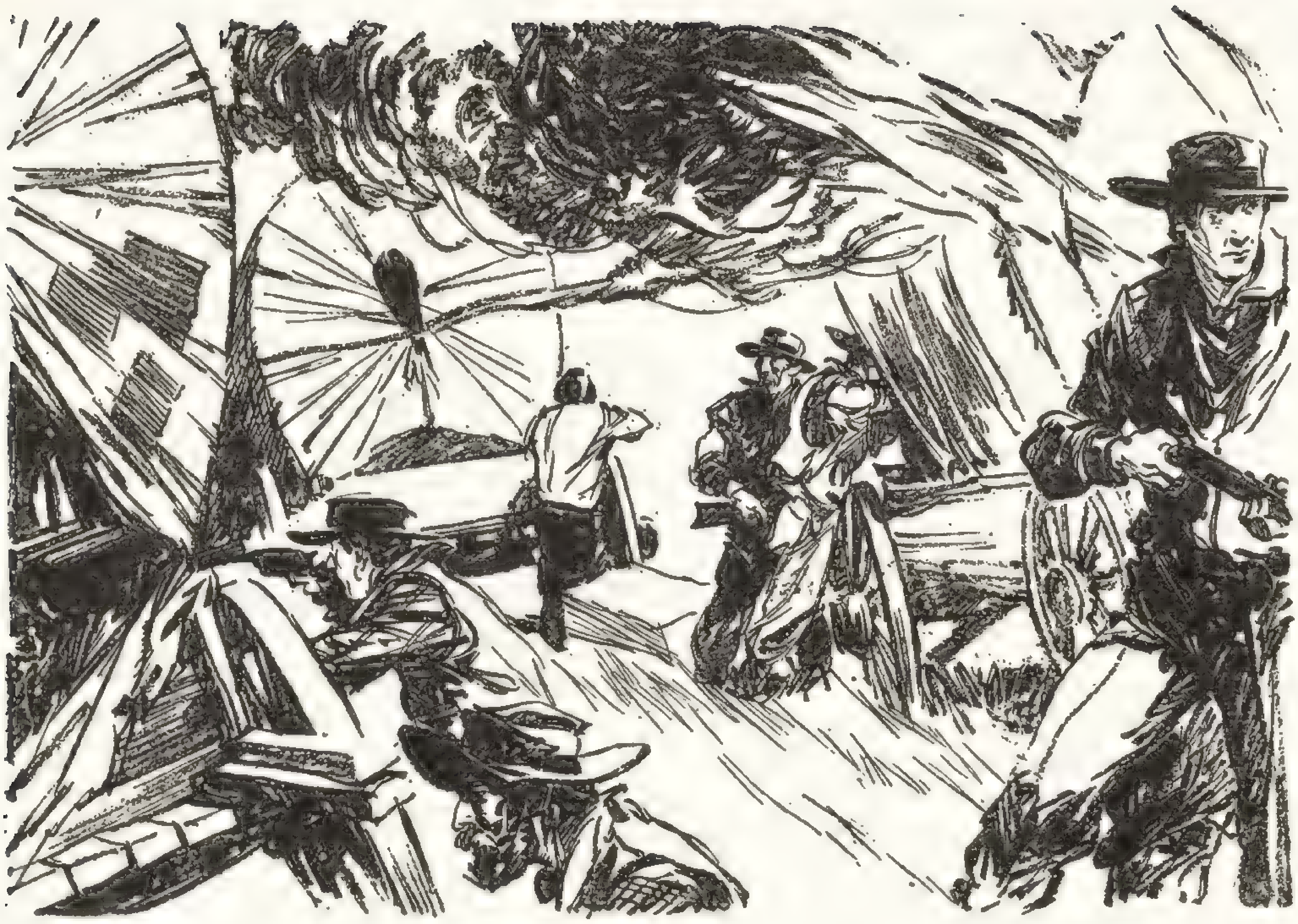
"You got me?" Alex asked. His voice was weak.

And then Jock had to change his tune. Cursing still, but softly, he referred in mysterious fashion to the insatiable appetite for cake that was possessed by some unexpurgated half men who not only ate it but hollered for more. For Jerry, smeared with dust and with charred spots on his clothing, showed white teeth in a signal that was not a surrender and showed the kind of man that steel had made of him.

"You're condemned tootin' I did, you beetle browed offshoot of a would-be steel slogger. And why? I'm particular about the kind of cinder I dig. And when you get back on the job again I'll show you who makes ladle additions."

"You won't show me," said Alex faintly. "I'm done."

And no one knows what Jerry would have said to that, though Red and Jock swear it never would have been a crow. For Jerry and Alex were for once in their lives in the same mood. Both had fainted.



A Novelette of the Old Covered Wagon Days

PROLOGUE

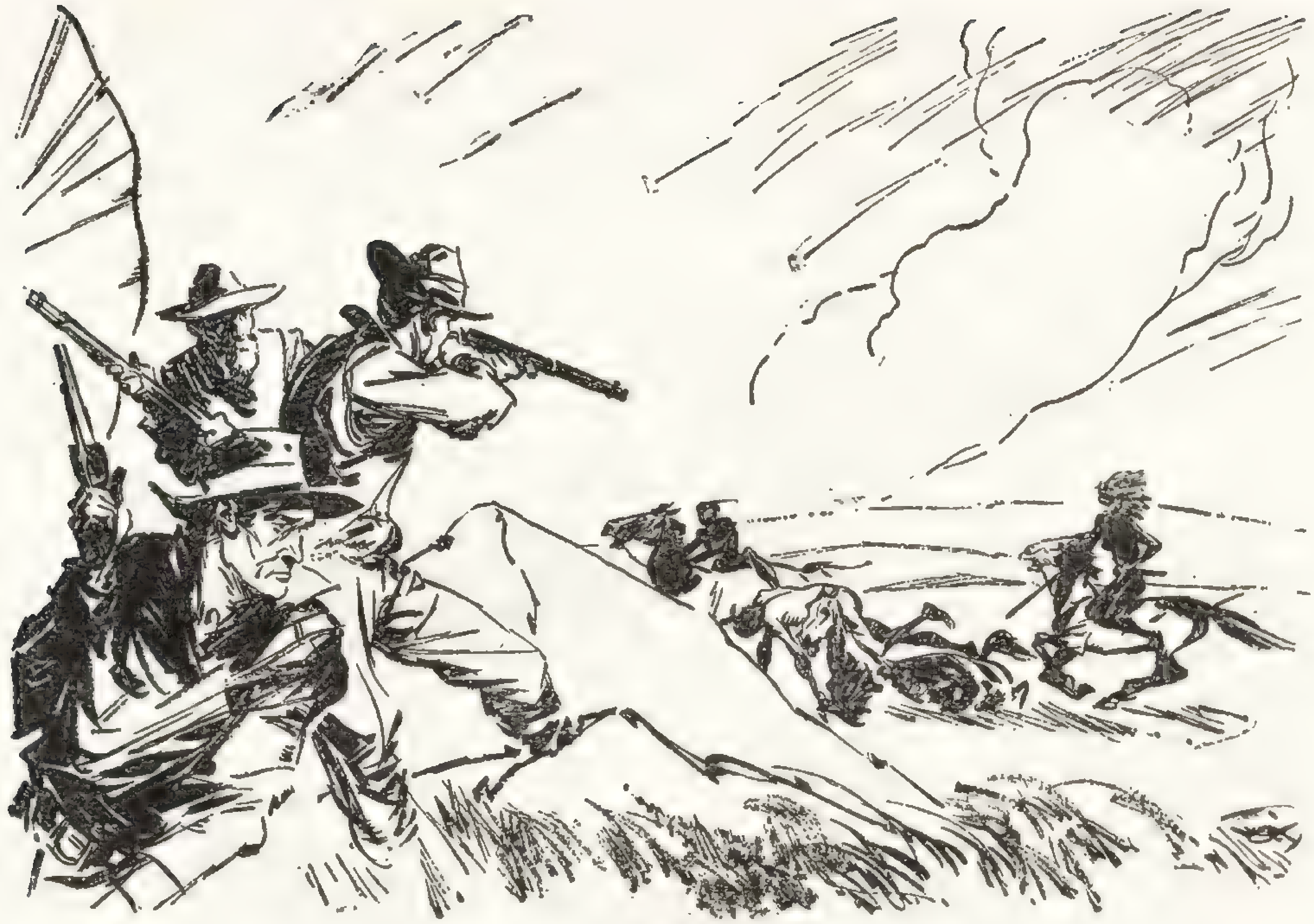
EBEN GILL, leader of the outfit bound for the new goldfields in the Territory of Colorado, discovered the faint smoke ahead and was the first to hear the sound of gunfire. He signaled the train and advanced at a smashing gallop to the top of a grassy ridge. Reining in, he remained motionless for a moment, incapacitated for instant action by the drama and tragedy of the scene ahead.

A small wagon train, formed in a fighting corral, was girt about by a revolving circle of Indians. The distance was too great to witness injury done to the attacked, but a terribly sinister note was the yellow flame suddenly sprouting from the top of one long schooner.

Galvanized into thought and action, Gill waved his hat frantically to the advance guard. These lifted their mounts into a gallop, and as they drew up Gill held his rifle high above his head, struck spurs into his horse and dashed down the slope. His companions followed his example.

As the little cavalcade advanced they heard the thin bark of guns and saw the spurts of smoke between the wheels. The cattle, heads to the center, were trying to stampede, crazed by the arrows and bullets of the Indians and by the smoke and heat of the burning wagon.

A shrill cry by the first red man to espy the white riders almost instantly broke the wheeling Indian circle into segments. These Indians quickly united and rode apart from the wagons.



SHANE GOES RIDING

By HUGH PENDEXTER

The enemy greatly outnumbered Gill's little band, yet he unhesitatingly changed his course and charged. The Indians were Kiowas. They were returning from their annual summer sun dance on the head of the Smoky Hill River. They were as brave and as bloodthirsty red people as were to be found on the central plains. One of them, having a medicine shield, darted ahead as if to meet the charge of Gill's little band single handed.

Old Wes White, veteran mountain man, threw up his rifle and his lead pierced the shield and found the heart of the Indian and instantly sent him to the "Land Of Many Lodges". This initial defeat somewhat dampened the fighting spirit of the Kiowas, but in no measure abated their lust for raiding. The Gill outfit now was in sight, and the Kiowas split in two bands and essayed to reach the oncoming wagons by passing on the flanks of the advance guard.

With business-like precision the white rifles crackled, each bullet finding horse or rider, and before another volley could be fired the survivors were fleeing for their lives to report to Setangya that the whites had a new medicine.

The scene at the besieged train was most pitiful. Gill scooped up a four year old boy, whose round face and blue eyes were frozen by horror, and passed him to a rider and directed that he be taken to the Gill wagon. The survivors pointed to a pretty little woman, who had been killed by the first volley, and said she was the child's mother.

"His father here?"

"She was to join her husband in Denver. From men returning from the mines she learned, fifty miles back, that he died during the winter."

"I'll raise him," said Gill. "What's his name?"

"Ned Shane."

"A good sounding name. Better than mine. Straighten out this mess. Bury the dead. Be ready to fall in with our wagons."

At the camp-fire that evening Old Wes White told Gill:

"There was a Shane in Californy who was a hell of a fighter. Called Dandy Shane. Pegged out on the Yuba in '59."

"This boy will fight his way all right. He'll make a good playmate for my little Betsy."

As the days passed the child became accustomed to his new friends and would prattle about his home life. From the odds and ends of his talk the Gills gathered he had lived in Philadelphia.

"You're a strong Union man," said Gill gravely. "No damned rebels in your family."

The boy did not remember his father, but he subscribed to Gill's sentiments and, pointing to three-year old Betsy Gill, said—

"I won't let any bad man hurt her."

"'Course you won't, younker," heartily indorsed Old Wes. "An' I'll l'arn you how to fight with gun an' knife."

The blue eyes became afraid and the child drew back. Mrs. Gill warned:

"Don't make any more blood and thunder talk to him. He's fair benumbed by what he's passed through."

And Old Wes sat beside the child in the swaying wagon for much of the night, awkwardly striving to comfort him in his misery.

As more days passed and the memory of the tragic scene faded somewhat Old Wes persisted in telling him he was a brave fighting man and must be the one to protect the little girl. To strengthen the effect he bluntly told the boy that his father was Dandy Shane, a famous fighting man. That was the start of the common belief that the orphan's father was the redoubtable Dandy. When Gill heard about it and would have dispelled the notion he found it was too late. The child already was proud of this fighting ancestor and the seed was allowed to sprout and grow.

Three years later the same round faced boy and the five-year old bit of femininity, Betsy Gill, stood on the bank of Beaver Creek and watched two score long haired, heavily armed men ride up from the east. Colorado had many long haired, bearded citizens, but these newcomers were not drawn to the mountains by reports of the latest rich strike. John Reynolds, lusting to emulate Quantrell's raid on Lawrence by sacking Denver, rode at the head of the column.

"They look bad," said the little Gill girl.

"I won't let them hurt you, Betsy," assured her companion. "My father was Dandy Shane, a big fighter." Thus was Old Wes's improvised bit of genealogy bearing fruit.

To be brave one must have a martial background and a line of fighting sires, to whose memory the loyal would pay tribute in deeds of daring. Old Wes was dead up in the mountains, slain by a Ute bullet, but his secret teachings continued to bear fruit. Eben Gill had disliked this method of creating stamina, but the mountain man had shrewdly argued:

"This is a fighting world, Eben. The younker must believe all his folks was brave. Then he'll be ashamed not to defend himself. I've only showed him that gittin' killed ain't nothin' along side of livin' yaller. Kid's chin ain't got th' forward push to it I'd like to see. An' his eyes are more like a gal's. Still, I'm seen a heap of mighty gentle lookin' men who was all hell in a rumpus."

As a result of this tutelage the boy took the girl's hand and held his ground and gravely repeated—

"I won't let them hurt you."

The column all but swept by with scarcely a man giving the two children a glance. But when the last couple came abreast of their position one man reined in and demanded—

"Your paps Southern, or rotten Yanks?"

He was ferocious in appearance. A wound, as made by a saber, had left a red scar from the bridge of his nose to the jaw. The little girl stared at him wonderingly, not understanding his question.

But the boy, often a listener to his foster father's patriotic harangues, stoutly answered—

"No damn' rebels in the Shane family, nor in the Gill family, neither."

"Yankee brats!" snarled the horseman; and he jumped his mount closer to the children's more elevated position.

"Don't, Disher! Leave the kids be. Come along!" cried his companion.

Disher raised his arm and struck savagely at the little couple with his quirt. The boy as quickly shifted his position and took the cruel lash around his neck and shoulders. It was the first pain, purposely inflicted, he ever had suffered. With a little choking cry he pushed the girl ahead of him among the boulders; and the raiders swept on.

CHAPTER I

REYNOLDS' MAP

AT THE age of twenty-four Ned Shane, still round of face and merry of eye, bore a scar low on his neck where the lash had cut to the bone. He never had forgotten Disher, and in his heart remained a white hot hate for the cowardly blow. The experience, and the reputation of the man he believed to have been his father, had spurred him on to almost daily practise with firearms and a knife. Old Wes had counseled that, although Eben Gill would have had it otherwise. The burning bite of the lash and a strong recollection of Disher's hideous face had been all compelling. Ned was an expert with lethal weapons.

Peculiarly enough, Shane did not believe he was congenitally courageous. Trouble was something to be walked around, not through. None suspected this, however. He always appeared to grapple with trouble with much gusto. He deceived Gill and even the girl Betsy. In each instance where there was need to resent imposition it required an effort to bring himself up to the right pitch. Experience, however, quickly taught him that the man who sought trouble was usually a quitter. And there was the legend of Dandy Shane which he knew he must live up to.

It worried Eben Gill, who loved the young man as he would a son, and invariably disguised the fact by assuming a brusk bearing toward him.

When Betsy Gill came to her father's store for groceries she was quick to note the scar, revealed by the unbuttoned shirt. Her snapping black eyes softened.

"You were such a brave little boy, Ned," she remarked.

"Land sakes, Bet, I'm as brave as a lion this minute," he told her. Then he grew soberly thoughtful and added, "But I haven't a bit of spunk when I think of what your father will say."

"Ned, you stood by me and took the lash for me. I can remember just how that brute looked. If pap gets loud talking at any time you leave him to me."

"This is a game, Bet, where the buck doesn't pass. And I don't want you around when he pulls in. Understand? The one time I don't want you around."

"I wish he would stay here instead of mooning around and fooling with mining claims."

"He knows his own business best," reminded Shane. "Some people probably thought he had enough work in bringing you up without taking me in. Yet this store should make him a rich man if I can run it right when he is away. Poor showing for me, he'll say, when he gets back. I'm going to make it up and say nothing about it."

"And if he ever found it out he would feel terribly hurt, Ned. You'll make up nothing. Remember that."

With this warning she took her basket and departed and Shane became busy with his duties.

The Gill store in Alamosa promised to

be a genuine bonanza, now that the town was the terminus of the Denver and Rio Grande railroad. Not only was it the busiest town in the Southwest, but also was one of the toughest. Stage lines radiated from the railhead in all directions. Business in wool, hides, pelts, machinery and bullion had increased so rapidly as to make it one of the miracle marts of the Southwest. Situated on the west bank of the Rio Grande del Norte, and in the center of the vast San Luis park, it was the focal point of a continuing and much varied commerce.

Gill had been away for two weeks. Near noon Shane heard the familiar, querulous voice and the stamping steps, and for the moment even the thought of his putative father, Dandy Shane, could not quell his nervousness.

Gill entered the store, his thin face wearing a worried expression. His greeting consisted of—

"Why aren't those potatoes sacked?"

"Mexican boys haven't finished sorting them. They aren't the same ones we had when you pulled out the last time. I've bought twice since then."

"You be mighty careful in buying. I'd rather have folks go a bit short then for me to have a lot of stuff left on my hands that I can't move. The floor looks as if it hadn't been swept for a month."

"You'd better take that up with Betsy. She swept it this morning as a demonstration to the boy of how a floor should be swept. He's careless with the corners. Shuns them, in fact. But with coaches leaving and arriving daily over five different lines, and folks milling here in mobs from the train, you just can't keep a floor clean. Say, that mine's fussing you again, ain't it? You're all out of temper. You should quit mining and give all your time to running this store."

"If I could get intelligent help I could swing this business and the San Juan claim easy enough," Gill grumbled. "When I'm here I'm worrying about the claim. When I'm there I'm worrying about you. Everything gone all right, I s'pose?"

Shane's cheeks took on a high color. He said:

"I was just telling Betsy not more'n half an hour ago that you'd blame me. But I vow I don't see how any one could have suspected anything crooked."

"Good Lord! What's happened now? I knew something bad had happened the minute I came in."

"Nothing terrific. You know that hundred dollars in gold?"

"You mean the hundred in the safe?" asked Gill.

"Was in the safe," gravely corrected Shane.

"Gone?"

"Where the woodbine twineth," sadly confessed Shane.

"By heavens, that settles it! It's a wonder they didn't take the safe and the long counter. You can't be trusted. You quit the store so's you could go to the house and see Betsy."

Shane sighed heavily and explained:

"Worse'n that. I was right here when the crook took it. In fact, I helped him."

Gill was puzzled as well as angry. He coldly prompted—

"Will you be so good as to explain what's become of my property?"

"Just what I was getting at." Shane affected a carelessness he was far from feeling. "A man came in here to buy some cartridges for his .45. Said he was a United States marshal, a friend of Frank Hyatt's. Wore a badge that said he was a marshal. Looked it, too. Wanted to know where he could find Hyatt. He was chasing a skunk who had robbed a safe in Denver, he said. Prob'ly robbed it himself. I told him we had a new fangled combination that made robbery impossible unless they blew the safe open. Say, Pap Gill, he was as pleased as a child. Wanted to look at it. I opened and shut the door, showing him how it worked. Then a man yelled for me to come to the front door. Said he couldn't leave his horses. I hustled out. The man asked lots of questions. Wanted to know what we were paying for wool and hides. Said he had a lot to sell. While we were talking the marshal bustled out and climbed his horse. The next time I went to the safe the money was gone."

"Just like handing it over to him, huh? Well, you're through. I'll give you your living, but I won't pay no hundred dollars a day for the privilege."

Shane pulled on a violently checked waistcoat, slung his coat over his arm, placed forty dollars in gold on the counter and started for the door.

"Hi! Hold your hosses! Where you think you're going? What's this donation mean?" cried Gill.

"I'm going to the house to tell Betsy I'm through. You owe me sixty in wages. There's forty. You've lost nothing."

"Put that money back in your pocket. You go near Bet with any yarn and I'll kill you. Take off that damn' vest and start a wagon of hides to the railroad. It's gitting so a man can't breathe in his own store."

It was not the first time Shane had been discharged and immediately reengaged. He removed the gay waistcoat and casually asked Gill—

"How's the claim panning out?"

"Get along with the hides! I'm too fussed up now to talk about it."

SHANE went to the rear of the store and gave orders to some Mexican teamsters, then returned to his employer and asked:

"Now what about that claim? Petered out like all the others?"

"Petered out nothing! I have only four weeks to take it up at twenty thousand dollars."

"You don't want to pay the option price if it's just another hole in the ground."

Gill glanced about. There were many things waiting to be done, but his trouble came first. Seizing Shane by the arm, he drew him behind the long counter and whispered:

"Claim's lousy with free gold! Smashed right into it before I knew what I'd find. Been covering up the signs ever since. I crippled myself by taking it on under lease and bond. Now that I've hit it right on the nose I'm scared blue for fear the Denver men will learn about it. I'm positive they've got a man planted among my workmen. Naturally they would have one there. He'd have to be a sharp cuss, or they wouldn't have him spying on me. The fact I quit working where I uncovered the signs, free gold and rich rock, will make him suspicious. If I fire him they'll send down another man to look the claim over. By this time he's sending word that I've hit it."

"You can buy it for twenty thousand?"

"Of course," Gill answered impatiently. "But I'm spread out so wide with wool and hide contracts, not to speak of what I put up for leasing the mine, I'd have to sacrifice everything here to raise that sum in cold cash. If I can hold on to this store for another six months I could do it easy. I must carry out my contracts. Just my luck to strike it rich with the option only a short time to run."

Shane rubbed his head to stimulate his thinking processes. Then he ventured—

"Remember that crowd, the Reynolds gang?"

"Yeah. And I remember the Civil War. What of it? They give you a lick with a whip. Betsy is always bringing it up."

"When that Reynolds outfit rode by me it was carrying seventy thousand dollars. They hid it before they were rounded up."*

"That hidden treasure stuff makes me sick."

"Forty thousand in greenbacks, wrapped in silk oilcloth. The rest was in gold dust, put up in tin cans."

"Dad fetch it! What if they hid a million? What's that got to do with me raising twenty thousand in less'n four weeks?"

"I'd sort of reckoned I'd take time off and scout for it."

"Bah!"

"You're the boss. I'll be getting back

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*Reynolds hid that amount in 1864. There is no record that it ever was found.

to my work. And cheer up. Maybe the claim isn't worth a tinker's dam. All the others weren't."

As Shane worked he recalled that spring morning when Disher lashed him. Of all that fierce company only a very few could have survived. Six, including the leader, were stood up and shot while ostensibly being taken to Fort Lyon as prisoners of war. Shane had listened much to men's talk about the treasure and had read the newspapers to learn more about the reckless raiders. He knew their names by heart, and he had had day dreams wherein he ran across some survivor. The story of the hidden loot was well authenticated despite Gill's skepticism. Shane had come to believe that sometime, somehow, the lost money would pay for the cut from Disher's quirt.

Alamosa was not interested in what happened before the railroad came to town. A new crop of road agents had sprung up since Gill opened his store. The Allison gang had robbed five stagecoaches close to the town inside of one month. One need not hark back to the 60's to find ruthless men.

At the noon hour Shane took time to hunt up City Marshal Hyatt. The marshal was also a superintendent of the Rocky Mountain Detective Association for New Mexico, Arizona and southern Colorado. He had displayed an interest in the younger man because of his early encounter with Reynolds' reckless raiders. He was eating in a restaurant when Shane located him. Shane joined him at the table and during the meal asked many pointed questions as to what Reynolds might have done with his loot.

Hyatt chuckled and said:

"Been bitten, eh? Wait a minute." He fished out pencil and paper, and said, "Young feller, there's been a heap of hunting for the stuff they toted by you and the little Gill girl the time you caught a whip around your neck. One of the gang made a map. I'll draw you a copy of it. But you'll be wasting your time."

He worked rapidly with the pencil and when he had finished he placed the result before Shane and explained:

"This is a copy of the map Reynolds gave to Albert Brown when he was dying. The fight took place halfway up Geneva Gulch. Reynolds had one big can of gold dust and the rest in currency. When dying he told Brown that before the fight in Geneva Gulch he and his brother buried the stuff in an old prospect hole just above the head of Deer Creek. They filled the hole up with stones and ten steps below it stuck a butcher knife into a tree and broke the handle off, leaving the exposed part of the blade pointing to the prospect hole."

"I'm awfully obliged for the map," said Shane.

"You shouldn't be. I'm doing you no kindness."

"You think I can't find it?"

"I think just that. A waste of time. Yet you might find it. No one else has, so it must be there waiting for you. If I could find it I'd be after it—again." He smiled.

"Do you believe any treasure was ever buried there?"

"Son, I surely believe it. But the chances of finding it are so slim you'd do better hunting for the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow. A fierce forest fire burned over that country since this map was made. Destroyed all landmarks and signs. Quaking aspen has sprung up. But I wish you luck."

"Thank you, Marshal. How are you getting along with the Allison gang?"

The marshal winced. The Allison outfit had defied him for some time.

"They're raiding down at Chama, New Mexico. I'm waiting for them to return here. Just now I'm more interested in Johnny Van Pelt. Helped Bill Morgan to break jail at Buena Vista. Morgan was in for killing his father-in-law. The two of them dusted to Old Mexico. But Johnny will return."

"Good luck to you in everything, Marshal."

Shane was off on the run to relieve his employer. He found Betsy keeping store while her father ate his dinner. The girl astounded him by seizing both his hands and whispering:

"I knew him! I knew him, I tell you."

"That makes two of them, Bet."

"I was scared when he came in. I felt like a little child again. I'd forgotten I'd grown up and that he couldn't remember me."

"What you talking about, Bet? Show me this *hombre* that gives you the jumps."

She glanced nervously about, then whispered:

"Disher! The man who slashed you with a whip!"

Shane stared, dumfounded.

"But you were too young to remember him," he said.

"No two men on earth are marked as he is marked. That red welt from high on his nose to down under his ear! Disher had that scar. This man did." She traced with her finger the course of Shane's scar.

"Doggone! But that sounds—where is he?"

"He went toward the railroad. He was afoot. Three other men waited for him outside. One called for him to hurry, or they'd lose the train. What would you do if you knew where they were?"

He looked a trifle foolish and countered—

"What did he want in here?"

"Ammunition for his guns. And he asked if Johnny Van Pelt was in town."

"Only Disher or some of his breed would want to find Johnny," mused Shane. "That is, unless they want to kill him."

"I told him I didn't know the man by sight."

"Van Pelt? Young cowboy gone wrong. Hyatt's after him. What else did Disher say?"

"Said he didn't know Pelt by sight, but wanted to hire a cowboy and heard he was a good one."

"Well, if that ain't the beatenest luck! That is, if Disher ain't left town."

"You know the train doesn't go for thirty minutes yet. You—you wouldn't have anything to do with that terrible man?" she gasped.

"Just like to watch him a trifle. He won't know me. You tell your pap to run this store awhile alone. And I must have some money—and a big hat. And all the fixings. It's to help your pap out on his claim. Explain things to him."

"Explain what? You told me nothing."

"He'll understand. He'll be mad, prob'ly. But it's for his good. You give me a goodby kiss and stop looking as if I was a ghost. The son of Dandy Shane knows what he's about."

"You can't remember your father."

Shane shook his head.

"I remember a woman bending over me. She must have been my mother. Old Wes said she was coming to the mountains to join my father, who already was dead. Your pap never talks about her and that fight with the Injuns."

CHAPTER II

DISHER RIDES AGAIN

DISHER was the one link in the hunt for the missing loot. As a member of Jim Reynolds' guerrilla band he should know the hiding place. That he was desirous of finding Van Pelt, reckless and dissolute, indicated a new program of brigandage, and possibly competition with the notorious Allison gang for some of the rich pickings awaiting the ruthless in the San Luis Park country. But that the hidden treasure came first was strongly indicated by Disher's taking to the railroad.

With a gun on his hip and a Mexican brush popper's hat on his shapely head, Shane hurried to the railroad station. The train was about to pull out. Without pausing to buy a ticket Shane swung aboard and worked his way forward to the smoking car. He was relieved that he passed no one who knew him. He halted just inside the smoker door and balanced himself as the train got under way. Then he saw his man well forward. He recognized Disher at the first glimpse. Again he felt the lash biting into his young flesh and a hand unconsciously went to his throat to ward off the blow. And he was also remembering all that Old Wes had told him about his courageous father.

Whenever his courage was inclined to lag he could always revive it by imagining what Dandy Shane would have done under similar circumstances. Also he was well acquainted with Johnny Van Pelt's audacious bearing and manners. He advanced and halted beside Disher and stared down into the brown, wounded face. Then he took his time to inspect the man's three companions.

"Think you'll know me again?" growled one of the men.

"I'm afraid so. I'd like to forgit you."

"You damn' young pup—" began the insulted one.

"Hold your hosses," quickly cut in Disher. "This young feller seems to have guts. What's your handle, mister? I'm called Disher."

Shane's expression lost its animosity.

"Disher who used to ride with the Reynolds outfit?" he asked eagerly.

"Yeah. But not so loud. Who be you?"

"Johnny Van Pelt." It was spoken proudly.

"Well of all the luck!" Disher came to his feet and shook hands heartily. "You're just the man I've been looking for! Heard all about you down at Taos and Las Vegas."

"Reckon lots of folks have heard about me," said Shane.

"Heaps of them, Johnny. But ain't you taking a risk? You're wanted, ain't you?"

"Always wanted, I reckon. But I come and go as I please. But why you been looking for me?" His tone was a bit truculent.

"Coby, shift forward and let the kid set with me." A hairy faced man with one dead eye moved ahead. "Johnny, I can use you fine in a little deal up-country," he continued as they were seated.

"Must be some hard deal when four of you can't swing it. And you one of Jim Reynolds' men. Hyatt's after me; but it don't seem to fuss me any. Who's after you? General Cook with his detectives?"

"Nothing like that. If the law was dogging me I'd be heading for the Border. It's the Allison outfit. Allison says I must stay in New Mexico."

"I'd like to see him try to keep me in New Mexico," said Shane. "If he comes fooling around me I'll shoot the buttons off'n him, and then turn him over to Governor Pitkin and pull down the thousand reward."

"He has a hard crowd with him," reminded Disher. "Bad gringos, Johnny. He knows I'm after something fat. Wanted me to throw in with him. When I sent my answer he sent back word for me to keep out of Colorado. If I had two more good men I'd shoot it out with him."

"I ain't afraid of no Allison," boasted Shane. "What's your game? It's got to be gilt edged to beat Allison's work along the stage roads. He taps 'em all. Held up five coaches in one day. Tired of that, he rode into Papagosa Springs, shot up the town and cleaned out all the money in the stores."

"That's no job if your men are right. I come near helping to burn Denver. I've got something bigger than stagecoaches."

"I hear you talking," snapped Shane. "Why don't you say something?"

The noise of the train precluded eavesdropping, yet Disher leaned forward, his lips close to Shane's ear, and said:

"I'm after more'n seventy thousand dollars. No officer can touch me if I land it. It's stuff that was cached years ago by my old leader, Jim Reynolds."

"Buried treasure stuff, eh?" sneered Shane. "Why don't you go after it alone?"

"Because I may have to shoot my way through the Allison outfit. After I git it I'll ride down the Arkansas. Boys here are all right, but I need some one who's more'n that."

"He's squatting beside you."

"Gawdfry! No one can ever say you talk bad about yourself."

"I'm good and I know it," Shane insisted. "You want to buy the use of my gun. How much is it worth?"

"One fifth of all we find."

"I'm in. Where is it?"

"South Park."

"Got anything to show just where? The park's sort of roomy."

"The very map that Jim Reynolds made. We're pushing through to Denver and then into the park over the Kenosha hills."

"I'll take cards. We'd better not all keep together. I'm going back."

Nothing broke the monotony of the journey for awhile. Shane stared from the window and fought down an incipient homesickness as he thought of Betsy Gill. Only by evoking the memory of Dandy Shane did he manage to keep to his rôle. It was fortunate that he fortified his courage before reaching Cuchara, for at that junction he was nearly jolted out of his purpose. He was in one of the rear cars, the window open. A man came from the telegraph office and told an expressman:

"They've settled Johnny Van Pelt's hash at last. He was shot to death in Alamosa an hour ago while resisting arrest. Got it off the wire as it was going through to the Denver papers."

Shane unbuttoned his coat and unfolded a newspaper in his lap to cover the hand ready to draw a gun. Not only did disaster threaten his treasure quest, but his life was in danger. He believed the climax had arrived when, after the train pulled out from the junction, he saw Disher enter the car and come down the swaying aisle. The man was greatly perturbed and could not conceal his emotion. Shane drew the gun and held it under the paper. Disher glanced swiftly about and sank into the opposite seat. Leaning forward, the scar livid, the eyes burning, he said—

"Trouble."

"Huh? What for?"

"Coby saw one of Allison's men on the junction platform. The man knew Coby. He also knows he runs with me. After one look the man ran inside. He's sent a telegram to Allison by this time."

Shane breathed more freely. He remarked lazily:

"Brother Allison will have to hustle to catch up with us. He won't even know where we're heading."

Disher shook his head and corrected:

"Every one in Colorado, almost, has heard of the gold cached by Reynolds. Allison will know what I'm after when he hears I'm headin' north. He'd chase after me, if only to have a fight. Wish I could pick up two more good men."

"You'll have an army before you're through. There won't be railroad fare for any of us if you keep taking on more men."

"I know Allison," said Disher slowly. "And I have some good men waiting to help me once I get into the park. I know Allison."

"Why sing it? I know him, but I ain't scared of him."

"You put heart into a feller, Johnny. Prob'ly I'm foolish to worry."

"That's all right for you, but how about me worrying, which I do when you talk of more men throwing in with us? My share won't amount to a tinker's dam."

"I said you'd take a fifth, and that goes, Johnny. You trust me, don't you?"

Shane grinned and answered:

"Yeah. Of course. But I trust my guns first. Remember that."

ONLY a miracle could prevent Disher and his men from learning about Pelt's demise; either by the gossip at stations, or by reading the newspapers. Consequently the ride to South Pueblo was nerve racking, and when that junction was reached Shane swung off the train and dodged behind the station house, his plans entirely reformed. After the train had departed he tarried and reconnoitered the platform to see if any of the Disher outfit had witnessed his flight and had detrained, unseen by him, to learn the reason.

Satisfied he was not being watched, nor would be pursued, he bought a ticket to Malta, and soon was rolling up the valley of the Arkansas. He believed that it now was a race against time. At Cañon City he secured a newspaper and read the account of Johnny Van Pelt's death, brought about by that enterprising young man's resisting arrest and electing to shoot it out with Hyatt while partially protected by a telegraph pole. It seemed impossible that Disher and his companions could longer remain in ignorance. It gave him a nervous thrill to imagine Disher aware of the tragedy and leaving the train at the first stop to ride south and seek vengeance. Then the soothing influence of Dandy Shane's granite nerve came back to his mind and soothed him.

Leaving the cars at Malta, he bought a horse and saddle and another gun and started through the mountains toward Fairplay, hoping to strike the heads of the South Platte below that town. At the end of a long day's travel he came to a small settlement which, he was informed, was known as Horsehide, because it was so tough. It consisted of a saloon and a few shacks.

He hitched his mount close to the saloon and entered and ordered some supper. Half a dozen patrons were in the room, five playing poker, while the sixth leaned against the end of the bar, brooding over a glass of whisky.

Shane seated himself at the table. The man at the bar asked him—

"Know the name of this town, stranger?"

"Yeah. Horsehide."

"Know why it's called that?"

"Because it's supposed to be tough."

"No supposin' about it. It is tough." He glared at the young man as if inviting a contradiction.

The shade of Dandy Shane did not demand that the opportunity for a quarrel should be prospected farther, and Shane shifted his attention to the gaming table. The gamblers, he noted, were not of the sleek professional type. They were roughly clothed and booted and wore their hair and mustaches long. Yet they seemed to have plenty of money. Unlike professionals, they drank heavily as they called for cards and made their bets. It made Shane shiver to see them toss off half a glass of Kansas double-rectified as if it were so much creek water. From the corner of his eye he saw the bartender nudge the drinker and jerk his head toward the window. The loafer slowly swung about and his eyes lighted as he beheld Shane's horse at the hitch-rail. Smashing down his glass, he cried—

"Damn my old boots if my old nag ain't come back!" He started for the door.

Shane, realizing that trouble had tracked him down, pulled a gun under cover of the small table and demanded—

"What do you mean, speaking about my horse?"

"Naw, I ain't speakin' about your hoss, stranger. I'm speakin' about mine," replied the loafer.

"The nag at the rail is mine. I wouldn't admire to see any one trouble him."

He resumed eating, one eye on the door. The man dropped his hat and bent forward as if to recover it. Instead he jerked a heavy knife from his bootleg and drew back his arm to make the cast. Shane fired from under the table, and with a scream the fellow swung about as if struck a mighty blow. The knife flew wild, nearly hitting one of the gamblers. Leaving the revolver in his lap, Shane assailed his supper, saying—

"This town may be tough, but I'm tougher."

"You busted this man's shoulder," accused the bartender.

"I usually hit what I aim at."

One of the gamblers called out—

"Who might you be, young feller?"

"Johnny Van Pelt."

"He's been killed down in Alamosa!" cried the bartender.

Shane grinned and said:

"So folks are telling. Hope they keep on thinking so."

The card players stared curiously at the young man. One of them announced:

"He's Pelt, all right. Young man, your horse is safe here. Glad the newspapers were printing lies when they said you was croaked."

"So am I."

"You know Charley Allison?"

"Do I know him!"

"Afraid of him?"

"Not of any man living."

"Good! That's the kind of men Charley likes. How'd you like to throw in with him?"

"If there's a good profit, yes."

"There'll be a prime profit. You're as good as in.

"But I ain't going back to Alamosa for a spell. Too much Frank Hyatt to suit me. If it's any game down there, I'm out."

The man laughed and said:

"Charley found Hyatt too bothersome. He's coming up here."

Shane finished a mouthful and asked casually—

"When will he pull in?"

"Expecting him anytime now."

Shane rose and told the wounded man:

"Stop your groaning. Have the bartender make a sling for your arm. Here, let's look at it."

He cut away the sleeve and revealed the wound. Then he began laughing. The wounded man glared impotently. The bartender and card players were puzzled. Shane explained:

"The joke's on me. Darned if I didn't miss the bone! Just went through this web of flesh underneath. Pour some whisky into it and keep away from rum for a few days and you'll be all right." He turned to the card players. "I'm going to put my nag under cover. Make room for me at that table when I get back."

Before any one could offer to accompany him, he was through the door and leading his mount toward a horse hovel back in the grove of quaking aspens. He passed the hovel and swung into the saddle. He knew he nearly had been caught between pincers, between the Allison and Disher outfits. It had been like a physical jolt to hear the gambler say Allison was due to arrive at any hour. Even had he been Dandy Shane he would have realized that Gill's necessity demanded finesse, plus the discovery of the treasure, rather than a fight with either of the rival searching parties. He rode on.

CHAPTER III

THE BIRD MAN

IT SEEMED to Shane as if he had been away from Alamosa and the Gills for ages, as he followed the old South Park stage road, more thickly populated along its borders than when Reynolds found but three ranches between the Elk and the Hancart creeks. He discovered the task of avoiding espionage promised to be more difficult than the actual quest for the buried money.

His huge hat permitted him to pose as a cowboy, and in that guise he repeatedly was compelled to refuse work. Between Hepburn's and Parmalee's ranch-houses he quit the road and struck for the head of Deer Creek. Besides his blankets he carried a supply of bacon, beans, hardtack and coffee, as he had planned to make his camp near the head of the creek.

He soon entered the area burned over by a destructive fire. The original growth had been destroyed. In its place had sprung up thickets of aspen. Travel became a hardship if he attempted to leave the narrow paths. As he advanced up the creek he came to more broken country where the new growth ceased. He knew he was near the timber line.

Coming to a boulder rimmed hollow, which was carpeted with new grass and was watered by a bubbling spring, he realized he had found an ideal camp site. Picketing his horse, he arranged a rude shelter by stretching a waterproof blanket over a narrow space between two big rocks. With the ends of the blanket weighted with rocks, his house was complete. Under this low roof he left his blankets and proceeded to prepare a supper of coffee, hardtack and bacon. The day's work was finished.

At sunrise he was eating his breakfast. Going afoot, he started for Geneva Gulch and spent half the day in locating the spot where the Reynolds gang had been surprised. He used considerable time in searching the thicket growth, not for buried money, but for some evidences of the fight. He was rewarded by a discolored wad of felt that at some time had been white. He smoothed it out and knew he was holding a fragment of the hat worn by Owen Singletary, who was killed by the posse at the moment Reynolds was wounded.

The hat meant nothing; and yet it gave Shane a queer thrill, almost of exultation. Taking out his map he studied it carefully. Other men had had similar maps, and each and every one of them had made for the dot that supposedly indicated the hiding place of the loot. He looked for the tree in which the blade of a butcher knife had been buried. He was forced to decide that the tree was destroyed by the big fire.

The common possession of maps, leading to nothing, appealed to his skepticism. He argued with himself, speaking half aloud:

"But why did they cross Deer Creek and come way up here to hide the stuff? Reynolds said they did that before the fight. They didn't know they were to have a fight that day. And why didn't they come down Elk Creek?"

For some minutes he brooded over the map, until he realized more fully than ever what small chance a man had of finding what was said to have been concealed. He knew many other searchers had done just what he was doing. He almost imagined he could discern the trail made by many men who had arrived, looked about and departed.

At last he replaced the map and insisted:

"Reynolds fooled them. He had the paper money and dust when he came up this way. He didn't have it when the posse jumped him. He fooled his own men, expecting to sneak back alone and clean up. Perhaps he hid it in a hole, as he said. That sounds likely, as he wouldn't take time to dig a hole. But he didn't hide it where this map says he did. Or, he may have been honest and meant to tell the truth with this map; but he was hard pressed for time."

Shane grew worried.

"Good land! What will Gill say? What has he been saying every day since I pulled out? What's Bet thinking? I've just got to make a killing, or I'll be ashamed to go back."

He spent some time looking about for an old prospect hole filled with loose rock. There were many crannies, holes and cavities, any one of which might fit the map, but none contained anything.

Much discouraged and more fully realizing how blindly a man must work, he returned to his camp and put beans to soak and set about cooking bacon for dinner. Every detail of the map was photographed on his memory. He did not need to refresh his recollection with the paper. He closed his eyes and surveyed the mental impress left by the rough sketch. Below his position was a small tributary to the creek, entering from the northwest. The spot at the forks of this subsidiary and the main stream would be almost due east of the spot where the outlaws had been surprised. As he pondered, the rest of the map died out, but the forks remained.

It was all guesswork, anyway. He bolted his bacon and hurried down the stream. He came to the junction of the tributary and the main stream and found that a ragged stand of pine had escaped the fire. He knew the spot looked much as it had when the first prospector entered the park. He commenced an exhaustive search for holes, whether left by nature, or made by miners or animals.

Now he was reasoning that Reynolds, on that tragic morning, must have been in haste to hide the loot and get back to his companions. The line of least resistance would lead him due east. If he took this course it would be natural for him to cache the stuff on the west side of the tributary or of the main stream. Time was precious, even though he never suspected his pursuers were about to close in. He would never bother to cross to the east side of the creek, as there would be no point to that procedure. His purpose was to hide the loot and get back to his mates before he could be followed and spied upon. A few rods from the camp, provided he were not seen, would have answered all the requirements of secrecy just as well. Thus reasoned Shane.

With this blind notion to start from, Shane proceeded up the tributary for a quarter of a mile, made a mark on a tree and heaped up some rocks, and then turned about and searched both banks carefully until he came to the starting point. He thrust his hand and arm into many holes, but found nothing. That finished the day's work.

He fried the softened beans that night with bacon and pronounced them excellent, although somewhat hard. He ate much hardtack and drank much coffee and realized his appetite would soon finish his supplies.

HE WAS wakened in the morning by the caroling of song birds. Never had he heard such a wealth of melody. He came up on one elbow and stared at the scattered growth to glimpse the sheen of a flitting wing, to discover a warbler perched on a limb. He was astounded to behold a ragged, disheveled creature standing on the lip of the slight depression, staring fixedly at him and all the while from his pursed lips issued the squeaky *sweet-sweet-sweet* of the yellow warbler, instantly followed by the rich, melodic *chip-churrs!* of the scarlet tanager, and the short, lively, intricate strain of the song sparrow. Shane rubbed his eyes to make sure that he was not dreaming and that the ecstatic melody was issuing from the lips of the forlorn, hairy creature and not from a feathered chorus.

"How do you do it?" was his first question.

"I like 'em. They talk to me." And he was giving the familiar "*Bob-white! Ah, bob-white*" of the quail.

"You're wonderful!" exclaimed Shane. "How many can you imitate?"

"They're my friends. They tell me things. I know all their songs."

Then the intruder advanced a step and demanded—

"What you a-pryin' an' a-huntin' round these parts for, stranger?"

"You've been watching me?" Shane countered.

"Every time you turned a rock, or poked your hand into a hole. Lucky for your hide that your hand come out empty every time."

"What do you think I was hunting for?" Shane rolled clear of his blanket and squatted on his heels, his hand resting on a gun.

"Blood money," was the prompt answer. "But it shan't be found. Blood of poor critters who was slaughtered by those devils." As he talked he rolled his eyes suspiciously.

Realizing the man was somewhat deranged, Shane encouraged—

"How long ago did all this happen?"

"Happen? Yesterday, of course. You must 'a' slept through the shootin'."

"I did. And we don't want any blood money. Let's have some hot coffee and bacon and beans."

This was a happy suggestion. The man's hand came from behind his back to thrust a butcher knife through the piece of rope that served as a belt, and his wild eyes lost some of their fierceness.

"Beans 'n' bacon is good eatin'," he said. "Coffee is a rare one to me." Then with ponderous gravity, "You see, I'm kept mortal busy watchin' for folks who come sneakin' round, an' I have to eat mighty poor victuals."

"But it all happened yesterday," reminded Shane.

The man nodded his head, stared vacuously and mumbled:

"Yesterday. Yes. Somethin' 'bout it bothers me. But it *was* yesterday. There was Cap'n Reynolds just back from hidin' th' stuff. I was peekin' at 'em from behind a big rock. Their camp was in a grove of big trees over'n Geneva Gulch. Th' hosses was turned out to graze. Dinner was cookin' in a big kettle. Two men was tendin' th' dinner. T'others was round Reynolds. He was dividin' what money 'n' dust he hadn't hid. Dippin' out th' dust with a spoon." He paused for a moment and twisted his lips, and Shane glanced about to find the cedar waxwing making the hushed, lisping *twee-twee-zee* notes.

"Dipping out the dust with a spoon," prompted Shane.

The man eyed him blankly for a moment and then picked up the thread of his narrative, saying:

"With a spoon. Yes—there was 'bout two hundred yards away from me a lot of big rocks. From my place I see a head pop up above a rock. Then another. Then more'n a dozen men stood up. I tried to yell out to Reynolds 'n' his men, but all th' guns cracked. Feller named Owen Singletary dropped dead. Reynolds, measurin' spoon in hand, was hit in th' arm, sendin' th' dust flyin' to hell 'n' gone. All th' men broke from th' rocks. Reynolds' men cut loose to th' bush, some not stoppin' to git their hosses. Th' shootin' men come a-whoopin' an' a-hellin' into th' camp, Jack Sparks ahead. I see 'em pick up a can of dust an' some amalgam that was took from a coach at McLaughlin's place 'n' a lot of pistols 'n' knives. Sparks 'n' his men scattered, to hunt, but didn't find nobody. I watched 'em a long time. When it got near night they cut off Singletary's head 'n' took it to Fairplay 'n' pickled it in alcohol. Want to go up 'n' see it?"

Shane shook his head and said—

"This all took place yesterday."

The man's expression became fretful. He replied impatiently:

"Tarnation, yes! It had to be. I shucked along after Sparks. I see 'em pick up a feller named Halliman at Nineteen ranch. Then they kept a-pickin' up more 'way down to th' Thirty-nine Mile ranch. Reynolds 'n' another man was chased 'way across th' Arkansas."

"How did you keep up with them?"

"Rode one of Reynolds' hosses. They took them men five miles from Russelville an' stood 'em up an' shot 'em to death. They was to take 'em to Fort Lyon, an' was to shoot 'em if they tried to git away. They give 'em every chance at Russelville, but th' boys was too smart. They know'd they'd be shot if they tried to run. When they was bein' took away one of 'em yelled out, 'Goodby. This is th' last of us.' Then they was stood up 'n' killed. All but th' sergeant fired over their heads. Men was agin such doin's. But th' sergeant cooked his man. Soldiers wouldn't shoot agin, only one man along of th' sergeant. He did shoot. Sergeant cooked th' rest with his revolver. Made me feel mortal sick. I rode 'way."

"Bad business," commented Shane.

The man leaned forward and whispered:

"Just what I say. Murder! That's why I don't go for havin' folks git that blood money 'n' gold dust."

"You must have seen them hide it?"

"I did. I see 'em leave a knife blade in a tree. After they was gone I set th' woods afire, burned down every mark." He chuckled as if amused.

"Good work," praised Shane. "What's your name?"

The man's merriment vanished. He glared suspiciously and demanded—

"What made you ask that?"

"We're friends. We'll eat together. I must call you by some name."

"Folks say I'm a bird man. You can call me Jo."

"Fine. Now, Jo, you start a blaze and here's the coffee and the pot. I'll slice some bacon and get the beans."

JO FELL to with alacrity and quickly proved himself an adept at preparing a meal in the open. As he worked he ran through an extensive repertoire of bird calls until the hidden hollow seemed to be a sanctuary for feathered songsters and hunters. Only one imitation jarred on Shane. It was the *cac-cac-cac* scream of the bald eagle.

The presence of this mental defective might be a great help or a great hinderance. From his crazy talk Shane believed the man had changed the hiding place of the Reynolds' loot. The thought of securing his confidence and thereby tricking him out of the dust and money was obnoxious. On the other hand the gold was not doing the fellow any good; and, because of his mania to keep it concealed for all time, it could do him no good. Eben Gill's needs were very pressing. The loot belonged to no man now except to him who might be lucky enough to find it.

"And if he can't or won't profit by his knowledge there are those coming who will get the truth from him even if they have to torture him like a red Injun," mused Shane.

Jo finished a suite of robin songs and calls, ranging from the salute to the morning through the love-making, mating, fright and beautiful evening song, to announce that the meal was ready. He ate like a famished wolf. When the breakfast was eaten Shane said:

"You'll have to go and get more provisions somewhere. Can you do that if I give you some money?"

Jo rubbed his head and confessed:

"I don't remember good. Write it down an' I can git it. Every one knows me up 'n' down this stretch of country. They call me Whistlin' Jo. They'd better call me Watchin' Jo. By Gawdfry, I do be watchin' all th' time. That stuff shan't be found to fetch more men up in front of guns."

"You know where it is." It was not a question but an assertion.

The lackwit nodded absent mindedly, then, filled with suspicion, cried—

"You shan't watch me 'n' find it; you shan't dog me when I go to it."

"I shall not watch you," Shane said, and he meant it. "But if I can find it I shall take it. It's doing you no good. There are men coming here very soon, who will kill you and me to get it. There are two bands of men. If they meet they will fight each other. Each is after what has been hidden. If you go to them as you came to me they will make you tell where it is. Then they will kill you. If you know where it is hidden they will burn the secret out of you. Do you understand what I am saying?"

"They'll make me tell, is what you say? They can't. They won't see me. They won't see me. If they hear they'll think I'm a bird. If I find 'em nigh th' place I'll kill 'em."

Shane was desperate. He asked:

"Why do you care about it, anyway? If you don't want it why bother about others' getting it? Show me where it is and I'll take you to my home and you'll always have plenty to eat and a good place to sleep."

The man's face grew somber. For a bit the crazy fires died down in his wild eyes.

"My brother," he whispered, "he rode with Reynolds. I saw him shot by th' sergeant. I don't want to see nobody else shot along of that cussed stuff."

Shane felt a great pity for the unfortunate. He now understood why the clock had stopped for him and why it always was yesterday. The terrible tragedy had unsettled his mind. Each morning he awoke to brood over yesterday. Shane said no more about the gold, but took pencil and paper and made out a list of foodstuffs. Passing out some money, he asked:

"You know how to count money? They won't cheat you?"

Jo shook his head violently, explaining:

"They ain't bad folks that I buy of. I can count. My head's bad, but I can buy things without bein' cheated. I'll go. No use for you to hunt where you was this mornin'. It useter be there. But I moved it."

He rose and pocketed the paper and greenbacks and ruffled his shaggy hair and held his head high, like an animal testing the breeze. Then he slipped from the hollow. Moving as softly as a shadow, he was gone. So silently did he move Shane believed he had halted to watch him, and he went to chide him for tarrying. But he had gone. An occasional bar of bird music marked his passage down the creek until he got beyond hearing.

Shane was in a disagreeable quandary.

He could not bring himself to spy on Jo, even did he possess the woodcraft to do so undetected. He was determined to secure the treasure at the earliest moment. Time was fighting against him. He was always picturing Eben Gill, unable to buy the mine. A renewal of the lease was impossible, now a strike had been made. As to the outlaws' loot, there was no ownership involved. But there was something strangely pathetic in the picture of an afflicted man standing sentinel over the hidden money and gold lest some one find it and come to the fate he had seen befall his brother.

"I pity the poor devil, but I must have that stuff if I can find it," decided Shane. "But I'd quit cold if it wasn't for Eben and Betsy." He slept poorly that night.

Early next morning while he was making coffee he heard a bird singing exquisitely in the new growth to the west. The melody drew nearer until close to the circular depression. Then Jo suddenly appeared between two boulders, his eyes shining at the sight of Shane.

"We'll always live together out here," he greeted. "All th' birds been tellin' me you're a good man."

"And you've fetched the fodder?" asked Shane.

Jo reached behind him and swung a big bundle into view, untied it and proudly pointed to the written list and handed over what was left of the money. He had brought everything Shane had written down. The storekeeper had written down the price of each item. Shane nodded in approval and asked—

"Did you see any strangers?"

The wild expression returned to worry the man's eyes, and he half rose and stared suspiciously at the growth. Twisting his head, he whispered—

"There was th' man with th' cut face."

Shane could feel his heart muscles tightening.

"How was he cut?" he questioned.

Jo leaned forward and drew a finger from Shane's nose down and under his ear, and whispered—

"He's a bad man."

"How many men with him?"

Jo held up three fingers and explained:

"Th' one with th' cut face was here yesterday when they was trapped in Geneva Gulch. They didn't catch him when they caught t'others."

"Hadn't you rather have me have the buried gold than to have him get it?" asked Shane.

Jo laughed without making a sound.

"He ain't goin' to have it. You're a good man. You mustn't touch it."

"He has a paper showing where it's hidden," said Shane. "It's like this—" and he took a stick and traced the map in the dirt. "Right there is where he will look for it."

A ghost of a grin played around Jo's lips.

"You went there," he reminded. "You didn't find it. I watched you. I'd moved it."

"Smart boy. Now let's eat a big breakfast and put out the fire so no one will see the smoke. Those men are coming this way. If they see me they'll shoot. And I shall shoot back."

"No, no," pleaded the unfortunate. "No shootin'. I saw Singletary shot. I saw my young brother shot."

"Why didn't you take the money to live on? To buy you new boots and clothes and plenty to eat?" asked Shane.

"Blood money. Blood money," mumbled Jo. "No one shall have it. Wait."

He was up a tree like a squirrel to gain the topmost perch. Soon he was back, panting heavily.

"They're here!" he announced.

"You saw them?"

Jo shook his head, but insisted:

"They're here. I know."

"Show me where the money is and then go with me to a place where you can sing your bird songs all day and eat and be happy. You shall live with me. When we've taken it away folks will stop hunting."

This was a new thought to be pondered over.

"If it would stop folks huntin' an'

fight—" mumbled Jo. "I'll ask the birds about it."

Shane saw to it that there were no live coals to betray their hiding place, then cached the provisions under a ledge and announced:

"I must watch those men. If they see me and talk with me, you keep out of sight. Now go up the tree and look for them again."

Jo readily complied with the request and remained several minutes in his swinging perch. When he had descended he announced breathlessly:

"We can't go now. T'other men come. Mebbe it's Jack Sparks. Mebbe he'll begin shootin'."

"No, Jo. They're all bad men. They are after the treasure. They'll pretend to work together till it's found; then they'll fight each other. We'll keep back and lay low. When it gets darker I must steal up and listen to them."

"They'll shoot! They'll stand each other up 'n' shoot! If you'll pull out now I'll git the stuff 'n' go away with you."

He would have hurried away had not Shane caught his arm and held him long enough to explain:

"We must keep low and wait. Wait till they make a camp and settle down."

CHAPTER IV

A DEAD MAN WALKS

JO URGED Shane to work back to the mountains and remain in hiding.

"I'll watch 'em an' tell you what's doin'," he eagerly added.

Shane shook his head and insisted:

"I must keep tabs on them. I want to hear what they're saying. I must make sure two different outfits are out there and not one big one."

"Two," Jo insisted. "The man with the cut face. He was with 'em yesterday when Sparks' men shot at 'em from behind the big rocks. Now he's back, while his friends are dead five miles below Russelville. T'other men are from Horsehide. I've seen 'em there when travelin' up to Fairplay to look at Singletary's head."

"That would be Allison's men. I'm going. You keep back."

He left the hollow and scouted through the growth toward where men were talking. Jo kept at his side as noiselessly as a fox. Shane gestured for him to go back, but the unfortunate paid no heed. But it was obvious he thoroughly disliked the venture.

The two finally reached a point where they could glimpse the newcomers and catch something of what was being said. Disher was there, as Jo had insisted, and he was talking with a tall man who, Shane knew, must be Allison. Back of the leaders were grouped their respective forces. Disher had picked up no new men. Allison had four in his band. The men eyed one another narrowly while their leaders conversed.

Disher was inclined to be conciliatory, doubtless because the odds in strength were against him. Shane came up in time to hear him say:

"And being here when it was hid, and being one of the 'riginal owners, I call it a mighty generous offer. A even split."

Allison grinned broadly, and asked—

"Do you know where it is?"

"I have my map."

"So does every one in Colorado have one of them maps. Maps ain't going to help us. There's nine of us all told. I'll do this. I'll throw in with you. But no matter who finds it the stuff must be split into nine shares."

"Being one of the 'riginal owners I figure an even split is doing the square thing."

"And one of the 'riginal losers," added Allison. "What do you say, boys, about splitting it in nine shares?" He put the question without turning his head.

His men promptly voiced their willingness. Disher put the question to his men. Coby answered, after a brief word with his two companions, and reported—

"Let her slide that way."

Allison was not through, however. He added:

"There is another man who may call for a share. He was in Horsehide. Maybe he lit out for this place ahead of me."

"He can ask and be damned," said Disher.

"Maybe. But you won't say that to his face, Disher. He happens to be Johnny Van Pelt."

"Curse that young hound! Is he up here?" roared Disher. "He ain't Van Pelt any more than I be. He's a make-believe. He was on the train with us. Lit out at some station. Claimed he was Van Pelt and ducked. Then we read in the paper how Pelt had been killed in Alamosa by Frank Hyatt."

Allison and his followers were amazed at this statement.

"You mean to say a younker claiming to be Van Pelt threw in with you?"

Disher nodded and briefly described the impostor. Allison said:

"Same pup! Boys told him they'd heard how Van Pelt had been killed. He laughed and insisted he was Pelt. Shot a hole through Big George's arm. But Pelt is dead, you say."

"Denver papers all had it. He quit us at, or near, South Pueblo."

"Let's make a camp," urged Allison. "I know a good place. And we'll send the boys out to gun for him. I never hankered for any of Van Pelt's gun, but I sure will knock a spoke out this younker's wheel. Had the nerve to run a bluff on my boys."

The two groups drifted away through the brush, but did not unite. Jo commenced imitating various birds and alarmed Shane. But none of the treasure seekers detected the counterfeit. But Shane preferred to be alone. He told his companion:

"You're better at following folks than I am, but you must remain back while I scout the camp. I must hear what they say. Do you understand?"

Jo bobbed his head, his face remaining expressionless.

Shane forged ahead. He looked back to make sure Jo was not following. The incompetent was not in sight.

The nine men made for the west fork of Deer Creek, and spying on them became more difficult as the timber afforded less cover. At times Shane had to wait until the men were out of sight, when he would rapidly advance. From tree to boulder he pushed on and followed the outlaws for nearly a mile. He was wondering if they were planning to camp above timber line, when he was conscious of no longer hearing their voices.

He cautiously left his hiding place and stole forward to a group of ragged pines. He was cocking his head to listen, when the world seemed to explode and fill his head with lightning of various colors. When he opened his eyes, his head aching, he found he could not move. He was tied hand and foot.

"Sleep well?" inquired an ironical voice, and a man stepped into his line of vision. The speaker was Coby.

It was half a minute before the prisoner's wits cleared. Then he demanded—

"Did you give me that clout over the head?"

"Never mind who made that present." Coby grinned. "Plenty more coming from where that did."

"You have the nerve to strike Johnny Van Pelt?"

Coby, still grinning, shook his head and answered:

"No use smacking a dead man. That game's played out. We know Pelt is dead."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Don't be curious. You'll find out fast enough."

Shane now heard other men talking and soon one called Boston and one of Allison's men appeared. Boston untied Shane's ankle thongs and roughly yanked him to his feet.

"What now?" asked Shane.

"Don't be curious," repeated Coby.

With a man on each side of him Shane walked north. To his surprise he soon was beholding a low log house, the roof of which was half open to the sky. He believed it must be a relic of the old days, when mountain men, never dreaming of gold, came to the park for beaver. Into this dilapidated structure he was pushed and forced to sit by Boston, who kicked his feet from under him.

"I'll remember that!" Shane said fiercely.

"Keep this in mind, too," said Coby as he struck him in the face.

"Queer sort of treasure you've found," said Boston with a deep chuckle.

"Maybe I've found more than you poor nitwits know about," Shane told him.

Boston's eyes dilated. He and Coby exchanged glances. He stepped to the door and looked around. Returning to Shane, he whispered—

"If you've found it and will tell us where to find it we'll let you loose and split it in three piles."

"Set me up with my back to the wall."

Boston did so and urged:

"What do you say? You shall have a third and your guns. If you knew what kind of a galoot Disher is, you'd say yes mighty quick. He'll cut your heart out."

"When he does that he can say goodby to seventy-odd thousand dollars," Shane replied.

Then his body jerked convulsively as he heard a bluejay scolding. He eyed the two men warily. Neither of them questioned the genuineness of the bird calls. The mention of the loot was causing great excitation. Coby, with a hissing intake of breath, whispered:

"Speak, damn you! I'll cut the truth from you." Shane believed he would make good his threat.

Boston seized his arm and whispered:

"Stop, you fool! Disher can do that. Let's trade with him. See here, feller. You must grab your chance quick or lose it. Go with us *now* to where the stuff is hid. Take a third and dust out. Or, stay here and die. But they'll make you talk first."

"I'll go with you," Shane agreed quickly. "But I must have my guns back and be untied. Not a step unless I'm free and armed. Stand me up and cut the ropes—"

He broke off abruptly as the jay's scolding sounded a more strident note. Heavy steps sounded and a familiar voice was saying:

"If he is still up here we must git him and cut the truth out of him. That's where the stuff was left the day the posse jumped us." Then Disher was filling the low doorway, his eyes blinking at the shadows.

"We've got him, boss! We've got him!" cried Coby.

Allison came in behind Disher, his face dour with disappointment. His face cleared as he beheld the prisoner. Disher, his face distorted by a savage grin, stared at Shane in silence for a moment and then told Allison:

"My two boys have done a good chore. They've fetched home this miserable rat. He looted the cache. Now to git to work on him."

Standing in front of Shane, he grinned sardonically, the scar on his face showing more livid. For an instant Shane was a little boy again and saw the quirt swinging back. Old Wes's stories of the fighting Dandy Shane flashed through his mind to stiffen his spine.

"Johnny Van Pelt, eh?" grunted Disher, and he drew back his leg and kicked the sole of Shane's heavy shoe.

Shane bit his lips to still a bubbling cry. He believed for a moment that his hip was dislocated.

ALLISON bent forward and scowled savagely into the young man's face and then slapped him heavily across the mouth.

"Pretended to be one of my men, huh?" he mumbled.

"Disher, if he hits or kicks me again I'll die before I'll tell anything. Allison, if Disher or any of his men touch me again you'll have no finger in the golden pie. Any man here can kill me quickly, but I'm the only man on earth who knows certain things. This business must be talked over. I must be untied."

"Fire for his feet. Burn it out of him!" yelled one of Allison's men.

But the two leaders drew back and

looked askance at each other. Coby and Boston took a position behind Allison and watched their leader for a signal. Allison quickly stepped to a low sashless window and breathed more easily as the face of one of his men confronted him. Others of his band appeared in the low doorway.

Disher turned to the prisoner, saying:

"If this young skunk will talk turkey we'll let him go. We'll have a pow-wow just as soon as my other man pulls in."

Allison stared questioningly at the man at the window. The fellow bowed his head slightly. Allison dropped on the floor, sitting cross-legged, and suggested:

"Let's get to talking now. Your man can catch up on what's been said once he comes in."

Disher obviously was worried. The missing fourth man presented a new problem. It was unlike him to wander away alone. He sensed a secret understanding between Allison and his followers. He decided:

"We'll wait till my man comes in. No hurry."

"But we must talk now," insisted Allison. "A crowd may pull in here from Horsehide at any minute."

"I won't talk till all the men are here," Shane spoke up.

"Is that so?" Allison purred softly. "Any other won'ts?"

"Yes, you imitation bad man. Step outside with me, with knife or gun, and you won't do any more thinking about the gold Disher helped hide!" Shane said defiantly.

"Disher hide gold and leave it all these years?" asked Allison with a laugh.

His ironical merriment was quickly followed by an animal growl and a mouthful of expletives. He came on his knees and drew back his fist and would have smashed the defiant countenance, had not Disher cried sternly:

"None of that, Allison. My men fetched this feller in. He isn't Van Pelt, but he's got guts. He must be treated right. My man will soon be here."

Shane laughed derisively and asked:

"Where was the fourth man, Disher? And with whom was he walking when you saw him last? With an Allison man? But all the Allison outfit are here. Why does your man linger? He can't have found the gold. I'll vouch for that. Disher, I believe this hidden loot has cost a life since you made me a prisoner. Call your man by name. After tiring of doing that, watch the sky for buzzards."

Allison's face became purple with rage.

"The sneak is fighting for time, Disher," he cried. "I can get the truth out of him in thirty seconds." And he drew his knife from its sheath.

Disher's face grew gray with apprehension. With but two men to back him, he stood but small chance of seeing New Mexico again, let alone receiving any of the hidden booty, did he come to an open break with the Allison outfit. Hooking his thumbs in his belt, he said:

"We'll wait for my man to come in. I always want all my boys with me when pulling anything from the fire."

The man at the window opposite Shane grinned. Shane called out:

"Allison's man behind you is laughing, Disher. They've cooked your man's goose. They're planning to whittle you down until there will be only five shares. You came up here four strong. Now you are three."

"Shut up, you crazy young fool!" shouted Disher, but there was no heat in his voice. "We'll cook something to eat. My man will come in. The gold can't run away."

"I want him to talk now, Disher," said Allison in an even voice.

"I won't talk now," said Shane. "I want food."

Allison worked his fingers nervously, locking them tightly and then pulling them apart. It was Disher's thumbs, hooked into the wide belt, that restrained him. He called out to his men to build a fire, open the supplies and prepare a meal. Shane noticed that Coby and Boston stuck close beside their chief, slyly whispering an occasional word from the corners of their mouths, while Allison's men collected dry fuel and started a cooking fire. Nor did Allison tarry in the hut once his men scattered about their camp duties.

With a furtive glance at door and window Disher whispered to the prisoner—

"Why be you so sartain my man's been hurt?"

"Killed. Rubbed out," murmured Shane. "Allison doesn't intend for you to have a finger in this pie."

Disher was worried.

"Too bad you couldn't 'a' been Pelt," he mumbled. "Just what is your game?"

"Reynolds' loot. I was starting for it when you blew into Alamosa."

"You know where it is?"

"Most likely. Maybe I have it."

"Have it, and still sticking round these parts and dogging us? Oh, no. But you may have a clear notion where it is. Can't we trade?"

"Not while I'm hog-tied like this. Get rid of Allison, or get away from him. He's scored one on you already."

"Damn' lie! My man'll come in soon."

"He may have found it, Chief," whispered Coby.

Disher winced. That suggestion pictured a worse alternative than did the suspicion of foul play on Allison's part. So long as the loot had not been removed every man could hope.

"Coby," he ordered, "you stay here and watch from the winder. Boston, you keep a few feet behind Allison. We'll go outside. I've cooked bigger geese then he is." He kneeled and examined Shane's thongs and then stalked from the room.

Shane stared up through the hole in the roof at the green boughs of the overhanging trees. The sun was low, and before supper was ready night would be upon the lonely country. The thongs were cruelly tight, and the prisoner increased his discomfiture by straining to loosen them. He made no headway with his wrists, but by sawing his legs back and forth while the guard stood at the window, he could feel the ropes give a trifle.

After meat had been fried and coffee made, bread was produced and some canned peaches. Allison had brought some candles along. Several of these were lighted and placed in the cabin. He and Disher entered with their plates and sat down to eat. No food was served the prisoner, and the sight of the peaches made his mouth water. He believed that neither of the two captains dared to leave the other out of sight. They scarcely talked while eating.

Shane's mind was busy with visioning the large stock of foodstuffs in the Gill store. He was convinced his fate was sealed once the loot was discovered. He feared they would resort to torture after a certain amount of searching and threatening failed to reward them. The sweat stood on his forehead as he endeavored to keep the last line of thought out of his mind. Feeling his courage slipping, he called on the shades of Dandy Shane and Old Wes to give him strength.

He fought against thinking about Betsy. It was not until after Disher and Allison had finished their supper that he found time to wonder what had become of Jo. He now believed that the whole adventure was the result of a crazy inspiration. Gill would lose his mine and, quite likely, his prosperous business. Neither he nor Betsy ever would know what had become of the young clerk. Remorse succeeded anger, and then hot rage returned and permitted him to forget all but revenge.

DISHER and Allison finished their meal and called for a man to remove the clutter. Addressing the prisoner, Disher said:

"Things are going to happen to you, young feller. It's all been talked out. Tell where that stuff's hid and you can go as free as a bird."

As though the last word were a cue a vibrant series of bird notes cleft the night. *Whip-poor-will! Chuck! Whip-poor-will! Chuck! Whip-poor-will! Chuck!* So close to the cabin did it sound that the outlaws gave a slight start at the first note.

"Let Allison's man tell," countered Shane. "The one who came upon your man just as he was finding the loot."

"You miserable liar!" shouted Allison. "Would I be here fussing to make you tell if any of my men had the loot?"

"It don't make sense," agreed Disher, "but I wish my man would show up."

"He may have found it and skipped out," suggested Allison.

"If I believed that we wouldn't bother with this sneaking traitor. I'd blow his brains out," snarled Disher.

Shane sensed the new peril. He quietly assured the two—

"No man in Colorado can locate the cached booty except one."

"Meaning yourself," added Allison.

"Exactly. Always provided Disher's man didn't come upon it by accident."

"But why all this talk about one of my men been wiped out by one of Allison's men?" demanded Disher.

"To reduce the shares from nine to eight. That was part of Allison's plan the minute he ran into you up here. You may have no outfit by the time the gold is found. The longer you hunt the fewer and larger will be the shares. Better warn your men to stick close to you, or another will be missing."

Allison snatched up a piece of firewood and leaned forward to strike.

"None of that, Allison," warned Disher, his fingers closing around his gun. "If he has the secret it's mighty poor business to kill him before he's told."

"Then let him keep his mouth shut along that line," panted Allison.

Disher suddenly went berserk. He feared the Allison outfit. He believed he was to be cheated out of the treasure. Suddenly drawing two guns, he announced:

"I'm going to run this business for a bit, Allison. All you men outside crowd in here. Big business meeting."

The six men came through the doorway. Allison's followers stared at the two guns and waited for their leader to give them their cue. He gave no signal, and it was Disher who explained, saying:

"We're going to try fire on this young feller's toes to make him talk. He's let on he knows where the gold is hid. He's going to tell us or have a mighty poor evening. Let one of Allison's men fetch in a pan of coals. Let another pull off his boots and stockings."

With mumbled approval, four of the men squatted in a semicircle. A man hurried forth to secure fire, while another dropped before Shane and untied the ankle thongs and started to pull off the boots. Shane drew up both knees, as if to evade the clutching hands, and then drove both booted feet violently forward, striking the fellow in the chest and knocking the breath from him. The struck man writhed and groaned and gasped for air.

A chorus of curses greeted Shane's defensive move, and several flung themselves upon him and secured his legs. Allison, his broad face wearing a cruel smile, fastened his gaze upon Disher. The latter was not watching the men, but had eyes only for Allison. The two guns, held limply in his hands, were excellent deterrents.

"They've bested him. Put up those damned guns," said Allison gruffly.

"Guns take the place of my missing man," muttered Disher.

"They've got him O. K. now," declared Allison, his eyes glittering. "Yank off those boots, boys. Dill, get to work."

"One minute," cried Disher. "There's something you all must understand. Once he's told his story you all stay here. Allison and me will go and fetch the stuff back. Now go ahead and make him squawk."

Allison now understood the meaning of the drawn guns. He felt that he had been outgamed.

Shane, although bound, twisted and fought like a madman with his head and knees. The boots were stubborn, and Shane worked his legs back and forth and bruised his assailants' hands. The man called Dill ferociously cried:

"Damn him! Squat on his knees! Then rip off or cut off them boots."

"Hold him flat on his back and sit on

each leg," spoke up Disher. "He can't bust loose."

Dill was pressing Shane's shoulders flat when a silence fell on the room and every inmate, including the prisoner, became as motionless as a figure of wood. It came again, a low, gasping, choking sound that was neither animal nor human. There followed the audible movement of some heavy body just outside the door. Allison could have secured Disher's guns in that brief lull had he not been like the others and held motionless under the strange spell of waiting, wondering and fearing.

The gasping cries came again, and the heavy dragging steps were all but at the door. All eyes were watching the opening. Then something took shape outside the door and the beholders' lips opened but made no sound. The thing stood on the threshold, half revealed in the candlelight, and even Shane felt the icy chill of horror as he glared at the distorted features of Disher's missing man.

The shape, or apparition—for there was a ghastly, mortal knife wound in the throat—slumped low to pass through the doorway, and then straightened, and swung a booted foot forward like an animated scarecrow. There were dirt and bits of brush on the clothing and in the straggling hair. And the stark eyes saw nothing.

With a shriek Disher was the first to speak. He screamed:

"He's come back! Dead! To tell who killed him!" And he pressed against the logs as if he would force himself through them.

His voice had broken the spell. With inarticulate sounds those nearest the window attempted to dive through it, and as a result two men were wedged in the framework and none could escape.

With a wailing scream the lifeless figure seemed to lift himself a few inches from the trodden floor, and went flying forward, the limp arms waving, to strike the group in front of the prisoner and to knock them over like nine pins. They fell in a smothering pile upon Disher and Allison, and the candles were extinguished.

Only Shane observed the miracle of one man's becoming two. He distinctly saw a man standing before him after the dead man had completed the demoralization of the outlaws. He felt himself picked up as if he were a child and carried out into the night. Some distance from the cabin he was set on his feet and a familiar voice was saying:

"Here's two guns I found on th' dead critter. Of course you heard my bird calls, didn't you?"

"Jo!" Shane whispered as he gripped the guns.

CHAPTER V

RUNNING SPECIAL

"THAT stuff has fetched too much trouble," said Jo, as he and Shane ate a cold breakfast a mile north of Shane's new camp.

"It will always fetch trouble until it's taken out of the country," said Shane. "Now I'm going scouting for those whelps. It's a fight to the finish."

"Don't, don't," begged Jo. "I don't never want to hear any more gun shootin'. When I see one of them bloody handed men knife that poor feller it made me feel sick. Comin' right on top of yesterday's shooting' it was too much."

"You mean the shooting at Russelville?"

"Five miles beyant Russelville—yes." Then Jo paused and scratched his head and frowned. "But that don't seem right, though. Yesterday you was with me, an' you wan't at no shootin' beyant Russelville. I vum! It makes my head ache."

Shane was greatly interested by this admission, although he had scant room in his mind except for his recent escape and his plans for the future.

"Jo," he said, "the yesterday you speak of was farther back. You've lost track of the time. The Russelville shooting was years ago; back in '64."

Jo rubbed his head violently and stared in bewilderment.

"But ain't it '64 now?" he asked.

Shane shook his head, but did not mention the years that had elapsed since he interposed his young body between Betsy Gill and Disher's lash. It made him feel peculiar to hark back to that dramatic meeting with the Reynolds gang, and to realize that even then the greater number of the band were riding to their doom.

"Let's not talk about it, Jo, just now. I'm sticking here to make a fight for that gold. If you know where it is, it's yours; but you must take it and use it. If it can't do you any good, then some one else will get it. And that some one else might as well be me as Allison or Disher."

Jo combed his fingers through his ragged hair and stared down at the ground. For several minutes he did not speak; then he explained:

"That money ain't to blame for what folks done to git it. But there's blood on it."

"And perhaps blood's on all the money that comes into our hands, if we did but know it," added Shane. "The money I gave you to buy supplies with may have been stolen at some time. Perhaps a man was killed because of it. All we have to do is to be honest when it's in our pockets."

As if not hearing him, Jo continued:

"My older brother left to fight for the South. And he found the South was licked. Instead of being a soldier he threw in with Reynolds and come back to Colorado. I see him shot along with t'others below Russelville. That sight done something bad to my head."

"Too bad you have to remember that. But the money wasn't to blame. If two men fight over a house, the house isn't to blame."

Jo pondered over this statement and finally decided:

"Difference a-tween houses 'n' gold. But anyway, I'm thinking th' gold 'n' greenbacks can't stay up here, a-fussin' folks into killin' one t'other. No, sirree!"

"What do you think you'll do with it?"

"I won't have nothin' to do with it. But if you can git it away an' put it to honest work I'll hand it over to you."

Shane, astounded by the unexpected offer, drew a deep breath and tried to explain to Jo that he would be content with less than a third of it. Or even with a loan of twenty thousand dollars. He insisted that Jo should live in comfort for the rest of his days.

"I feel like I'd been away for a long time," Jo explained. "I wouldn't know how to handle it. I'd hate to touch it. My brother's blood is on it. But if you can git it out you can take me along with you 'n' find me some work to do."

"I've already offered to do that, Jo. I'll gladly do it if I never see a cent of that money. You shall live in a good home and have work that you like. Now see if you can understand this—my working to find that money."

He proceeded to explain his pressing need of twenty thousand dollars, and all that that sum meant to his friends. In concluding, he said:

"Once that claim is cinched, I'm sure I'll soon get the twenty thousand back. Throw in with us. Lend us twenty thousand and we'll all be happy."

"Don't want a cent," firmly insisted Jo. "I don't know nothin' 'bout money. All I know is how to skulk through this country 'n' talk with th' birds. I've got your hoss hid out. When you reckon it's safe we'll do a bit of diggin' an' light out."

"You saved the horse? That's good news. We'll get the horse and start for the money."

Jo shook his head slowly and explained:

"There's something more. Last night I heard guns firin'. We'd better wait a bit."

Then he became silent and appeared to be uneasy. Not until afternoon would he leave their hiding place, and even then he insisted on going alone. In half an hour he was back, leading the horse. Picketing the animal, he motioned for Shane to follow him and proceeded to lead the way some distance above the timberline. He pointed to the ground at his feet and said:

"It's down there. Dig if you want to."

Curiously enough, it was Shane who now urged further delay. He said:

"We must be sure none of those men are hanging around to jump us. We'll wait until we know they've quit the park."

"I heard guns in the night."

"Then they were shooting each other," said Shane.

They left the treasure undisturbed and went back to their camp. Shane was discouraged and alarmed when Jo suddenly surrendered to his old fears and fancies. He pointed to buzzards quartering the sky and whispered:

"Devil's work. They've killed somebody."

"Probably shooting at their shadows, or signaling," soothed Shane.

"If there's been more killin' I'd say th' stuff should stay where it is," mumbled Jo, his sharp eyes staring at the buzzards.

Shane was worried. There had been moments when he had been determined to take all the treasure, could he find it. Now that he knew where to dig he found he could take none of it without his companion's sanction. Jo, except when laboring under one of his spells, was rational; at least, erratic instead of crazy. But the delay was maddening. Time was fighting against Eben Gill, his great benefactor. And so long as the Allison and Disher outfits were in that section of the park there remained but small likelihood of his removing the money. Jo, to the contrary, insisted:

"Can't stop gun firing till th' stuff has been took away. While the gold's here they'll stand each other up 'n' kill."

"They're scared," said Shane. "They believe that dead man came alone to the cabin. If they hear anything move in the woods, they shoot. We'll take the gold away, then only the birds will be heard up here."

"They've follered that gold a long way," said Jo.

"We'll get it," decided Shane. "I'll round up the horse. You fetch the stuff. Take a blanket with you to put it in. We'll go in the night if you can lead the way to the old stage road."

"I can lead the way with a hanker tied over my eyes. Let's go now. I'll fetch th' hoss 'n' we'll hyper up there."

But Shane had another piece of business on his mind. He directed:

"You get along with the horse. I'll drift to the west a bit and look for a smoke."

"You'll git nabbed agin," Jo protested.

Shane shook his head and repeated:

"Get along with the horse. I'll find you soon enough. I must know what they're up to before starting to pull out."

* * *

JO DID not approve of a separation. Shane's captivity had lessened his respect for his companion's woodcraft. It required much tact and urging before he would agree. At that he went slowly and reluctantly, and Shane, as he hurried to the west, feared he would be followed. Now that he had recovered from the shock of his capture and the ensuing abuse, he discovered the scar on his chest was burning. His hatred for Disher was all consuming. Twice they had met and twice he had received hurt. His rancor against Allison was nothing beside what he felt toward Disher. He repeated mechanically—

"No damn' rebels in the Shane family."

He felt better for this avowal. It voiced the sentiments of Dandy Shane and Old Wes White in their lifetimes.

He knew Disher would strike for New Mexico, and he believed he would travel by the Denver and the Rio Grande railroad. Nor could he imagine the man passing through Alamosa without looking him up. Allison did not count in his thoughts. Allison was but one of many bad men riding toward a noose.

Disher represented a vendetta, commenced in '64 with a little boy and girl as the butts of his cruelty. Shane had built up in his mind the idea that, treasure or no treasure, the West was too small for him and Jim Reynolds' right hand man.

He examined the guns supplied him by Jo and found them in perfect condition. The former owner had been stuck in the throat, like a pig, before he could lay hand on a gun. For half a mile he neither heard nor saw any signs of the enemy. His first intimation that the hunt was growing warm came through the sense of smell. Wood smoke. He tested the almost imperceptible breeze. It was from the west. Advancing toward the north for a hundred rods, he again advanced toward the west. He was moving with his utmost stealth when the sudden sound of flapping wings halted him. From a tiny clearing beyond a fringe of aspens several high shouldered, lumbering birds took wing.

He shrank from what he knew lay there in the open; but he was after definite knowledge. Gently penetrating the thin thicket, he halted and stared at the silent figures of two men on the ground. He identified one by his hat and the other by his belt of plaited rawhide. Both had belonged to the Allison outfit. Jo had been right in insisting that he had heard gunfire during the night of the rescue.

He passed south of the thicket and the aroma of wood smoke became more pronounced. Next he heard voices and advanced even more cautiously. When the voices became intelligible he dropped to the ground and listened.

"And Boston's gone," were the first words he distinguished.

"So's two of Allison's prime hands," replied Disher's raucous voice. "Damn 'em! They 'lowed they'd jump me, and I rubbed out two of them. Done it there in the moonlight. That cuts 'em down to three men, an' two of them are yaller. It's easy as holding up a freight wagon. We'll take their hosses and grub an' hunt for that cache. If we don't find it we'll take th' hosses and sell 'em. Then we'll go south. I know a rich spot in Alamosa."

"None of that Hyatt's gun in mine, thank ye." The speaker was Coby.

"Fool! Who wants to start a fight in Alamosa? I want gold. I know where we can make a big haul. No danger at all. One good lick, and we're off to Old Mexico where we can raise another band and live like kings."

This impressed Coby.

"How can you pick up a pot in Alamosa?" he asked.

"That store we went into. Old cuss is lousy with gold. One of the boys opened the safe and sneaked a hundred. If the fool had kept his head he could sneaked a thousand. Mebbe five thousand."

"That sounds if we have good hosses round the corner. And why stick here and hunt for that gold and have Allison and his two men jump us any second?" It was Coby who asked this.

"I'm going to do the jumping. I'm going to bag Allison, or never wear a gun again. I've whittled them down to three men. I'm going to clean them out. You can go along or stay here."

"I'll trail along." There was no eagerness in this speech. "I hate this damn' place. I don't want to be left alone. What was it fetched our pard back. A dead man can't walk; yet he did."

"He was toted to the door by somebody and tossed in. I see a shape behind him."

"Judas! Whose shape? Who is it? What is it? What killed him and will kill us if we ain't mighty keen?"

"The Allison outfit done for him. Stuck a knife in his gullet when making believe they was hunting for the gold. The thing, or whatever it was, hasn't made any play for us."

"Must 'a' toted the young feller away. When I crawled to my feet he was gone. Mebbe it's a friend of his."

"Hope so. That shows he's mortal and I ain't afraid of any mortal on earth. After I've finished with Allison I'll look him up and l'arn what he knows about the gold and greenbacks."

There was a rustling of bush growth and a crackling of dead branches as the two men started to leave their hiding place. Shane had time to give one fleeting thought to Dandy Shane, and then started to pull his guns; for the two men were all but upon him. Before he could change his posture the growth suddenly parted and Disher and Coby stood staring at him as he squatted in their path.

Shane was almost as nonplused as they for the first second. Disher yelled:

"Damn him! We've got him!"

The two went for their guns, drawing with lightning rapidity. Disher fired first, the bullet striking the ground close to the huddled figure. Shane fired without raising his gun, catching Disher in the chest. At the same instant he felt a blow on his left arm and discovered he was reduced to a one-gun fighter until the bone mended. He fired at Coby, catching him on the fifth rib. Disher, who should have fallen because of his mortal wound, kept his feet, swaying drunkenly and using both hands to cock his .45.

The two reports blended almost as one. Shane fell backward under the impact of the heavy ball smashing his left shoulder. From his prone position he essayed to fire again at Disher, but the man was on his face, arms and legs sprawled out.

Faint and sick, Shane rolled on his right side and endeavored to get on his feet. Heavy steps were crashing through the growth, and he rested on one knee, his .44 half raised. A hairy face was thrust through the cover. Shane cried one word, "Jo!", and pitched forward insensible.

FOR MORE than two weeks Shane was confined to a bed in Parmalee's ranch-house on the old stage road before he was able to travel. He was urged to complete his convalescence, but once he realized how long he had been helpless, feverish and out of his mind at times, there was no holding him. Jo, his nurse, strongly objected to his leaving his bed.

But Shane would not listen. He asked—

"Where's the stuff?"

"Hid near here. You go to sleep."

"Get my pants. Get the horses. We must pull out. The best friend I have on earth is on the edge of losing his last dollar. Get me to the railroad."

"I was afraid you'd be took this way," said Jo. "Knew you couldn't ride no hoss. I've fixed it to hire a light cart 'n' a pair of hosses. I told th' man here that th' Allison gang jumped us."

It was three days before Shane could travel, and even then he spent much of the wagon travel lying on a pallet of blankets. The treasure, in a flour sack and blankets, was at his head. A ranch hand was hired to do the driving and bring the team back. Shane could pay nothing for his stay at the ranch, but insisted on giving the rancher his horse. Jo's story that he had killed two of Allison's men before being incapacitated won much admiration from the ranch people.

When the cart had landed the travelers at a tiny flag station Shane groaned in misery as he counted the few days left for him to arrive on time. The station agent said the first telegraph office for commercial messages was at South Pueblo. At last the long train pulled in, and the wreck of a man, dragging his feet, and a scarecrow of a man carrying a big bundle, climbed aboard.

It was a short run to the junction, but it was long enough to cause his emaciated face to burn with fever. He was quick to talk with the conductor and produce much money as a guarantee of good faith. He soon had the official's sympathy and support.

"You'll have to wait till you make Cuchara Junction," the conductor informed him. "I'll put your telegram through so it won't cause you any double waiting. It'll cost you a heap of money."

"I can pay. I'll be glad to pay. Can you get an answer back while we are in Pueblo?"

"Possibly. Depends on how much of a load the wires are carrying."

Like one possessed Shane glared from the window and watched the monotonous landscape wheel by him. When the train pulled in at Pueblo he was too weak and nervous to leave the car and walk the platform. His eyes were glued on the telegraph office. He saw nothing of the crowd, heard nothing of the jumbled talk. He could catch glimpses of the conductor in consultation with the operator. Water was taken on. Fuel was replenished.

The last of the passengers were in their seats. Then the conductor emerged and waved his hand and waited for the last car before gracefully swinging aboard.

Looking back, Shane glimpsed him in the car behind, walking with spraddling steps. He felt that the man was beastly slow and deliberate. Only one thing on earth was of prime importance just then. But the conductor leisurely examined tickets, gave advice, paused to exchange laughing gossip with acquaintances. He was chuckling over some story when he came down the aisle toward Shane.

"What's the word? Do I get it?" Shane asked fiercely.

The conductor finished collecting a cash fare and then reported:

"Switch engine and a car to balance it. But you'll have to plank down two thousand dollars in advance."

"Done, thank God! Done! Will we travel fast?"

"Quite some considerable to keep out of my way. You're running wild. Up-trains will be held on sidings. Well, I wish you luck. If the engine jumps the track I'll feel I'm to blame."

From then on until on the outskirts of Cuchara Shane was nervous. All sorts of hindrances suggested themselves to his fevered mind. At last, completely exhausted by his reaction, he slept with his head pillowed on Jo's shoulder. Nor did Jo dare to move for fear of waking him. He was but half awake when Cuchara was called. Jo led the way with the big bundle and deposited the treasure on the platform so that he might turn and help his companion down the steps. The conductor bustled after them, saying—

"I'll go with you to the telegraph office, where you will pay your money."

The transaction was completed as soon as the money, counted and set apart on the train, could be counted by the agent, who remarked—

"These bills are all right, but they look as if they'd had a hell of a hard time."

"Not so hard as I've had in earning them, friend," assured Shane. "Get me on that car."

The special was waiting on a siding. As soon as the two passengers were aboard the wheels began to revolve. Shane, at the point of collapse, rested his head on Jo's shoulder and slept. Jo, sitting erect and staring straight ahead, endeavored to reconcile the lapse of time since he saw his wayward brother shot down in cold blood five miles below Russelville.

Since the night of Shane's escape from the outlaw the unfortunate's memory had been returning gradually, but there remained much in the lost years to bewilder him. Blank stretches were to be filled in. Yet he was happy in his way to have found a friend to greet him when he emerged from the darkness. Shane had told him of his marvelous ability to imitate the birds, but he had lost the knack and had no memory of it. When the special was within a few miles of Alamosa he aroused Shane. The sun was down, leaving a cloud of crimson over the Continental Divide.

Trembling like one with the ague, Shane asked his companion:

"How long have I slept? What time is it? What day of the month is it?"

To the last part of the double question Jo shook his head. His mental rehabilitation did not include an interest in the calendar. As for the hour, he fished Shane's watch from Shane's pocket and held it up before his eyes.

"Eleven o'clock. An hour to midnight. I'm sure it's the sixteenth, that we have another twenty-four hours. I intended to ask at Cuchara. Too sick. Too excited."

"You'll be in time, then," said Jo.

"Either twenty-four hours' leeway, or a race against seconds."

"Better simmer down an' keep your shirt on," advised Jo. "Why fuss about a day or so, when I can't believe it isn't '64 instead of '81?"

"Jo, you've been a good friend to me," said Shane. "You saved my life. If I win out at Alamosa you've saved my happiness, saved a very fine man from unhappiness, and perhaps from poverty. You will have saved the most wonderful girl in the world from unhappiness. And

I'm too damned selfish to thank you decently."

"Good land, how you talk! And swearing! Lights ahead. This must be your home diggin's."

"Alamosa!" bawled a trainman as the special came to a halt.

A crowd of curious people pressed forward to learn the cause of the special. They had supposed it was the passenger train, arriving ahead of time.

Shane had to act as pilot, as Jo was quite befuddled by the sudden swirl of humanity. Some one cried:

"That's Ned Shane! Come just in time to see Eben Gill lose his business!"

"God forgive me! It's the seventeenth!" groaned Shane.

He clutched Jo's arm and used Jo as a plough to force a passage through the throng. He gave a feeble whoop of joy as he beheld one of Gill's freight outfits. The driver was inside the freight house.

"Hop up there, Jo, and lend me a hand," Shane commanded.

Muttering a protest over taking liberties with other folks' property, Jo obeyed. Standing behind the seat and leaning against it, Shane picked up the reins and commanded Jo to crack the whip over the leaders, and yelled to the horses, speaking to each by name.

Lights were shining in the Gill store when the long wagon came to a halt before the open door. Jo leaped down and helped Shane to the ground. Shane pointed to the steps, and Jo threw the bundle over his shoulder and seized his friend's arm and helped him to the store platform and through the doorway.

The two nondescript figures attracted no attention, as others were in the store from curiosity as well as for belated trading. Eben Gill, thin of face and hopeless of expression, stood with three men at the lower end of the long counter. One of the men was saying:

"And the time has expired. Admit you can not take the claim over at the option price. We refuse to re-lease. We have served you with a legal notice to quit the premises by, or before, midnight, tonight. Our superintendent takes charge in the morning."

"I understand," said Gill in a weary voice. "Your superintendent is the sneak who took my pay and spied on me."

The three owners laughed good naturedly. The spokesman pulled forth a legal looking document and patted it against his open hand and reminded:

"What's your hard luck is our good luck, Gill. You should have come to us in the first place and we'd paid you a big bonus to quit on the spot. Crazy idea to think you could carry it through."

"Damn you! I could have put it through, even if I was tied up with contracts, if you hadn't fixed it so I couldn't git any money from the banks. You folks lied about me. And I might have pulled through even at that if my young partner hadn't suddenly been taken crazy. He lit out, and I had to stick here to keep this business going."

"You saved your store," suavely spoke up another of the trio.

"Darn your hide, no! Why say that when you know I'm flat busted. If it's any more happiness to you I'll say my little girl is broken hearted."

"Well, well. Business is business," reminded the first speaker. "You have received your legal notice and you're finished with the claim."

"No he isn't!" yelled Shane, tottering forward, followed by Jo. "Not by a damn' sight! His time isn't up till midnight, is it?"

"Not until midnight," replied Gill, his mind stupid because of the rather violent intrusion of a stranger.

"And twenty thousand dollars is the price of that claim up to midnight, old friend?"

"Yes, of course. But who are you behind all those whiskers and looking more like a dead man then a live one?"

"Open up our wallet, Jo. You three merry lads must sup on sorrow. There, Eben, there's the money. Count out twenty thousand and tell these three slickers to go to hell. Darn it, Eben, don't you know me? Do I look as bad as that?"

"Ned! Ned Shane!" cried a shrill voice, and Betsy Gill came running from the rear of the store, where she had retired to conceal her misery.

"Oh, Lawd! Ned Shane! And he's fetched home the bacon," hysterically cried Gill as he buried his hands in the greenbacks.

"Best of all, I've fetched with me the most faithful friend a man ever had. This is Jo. Thank him and not me."

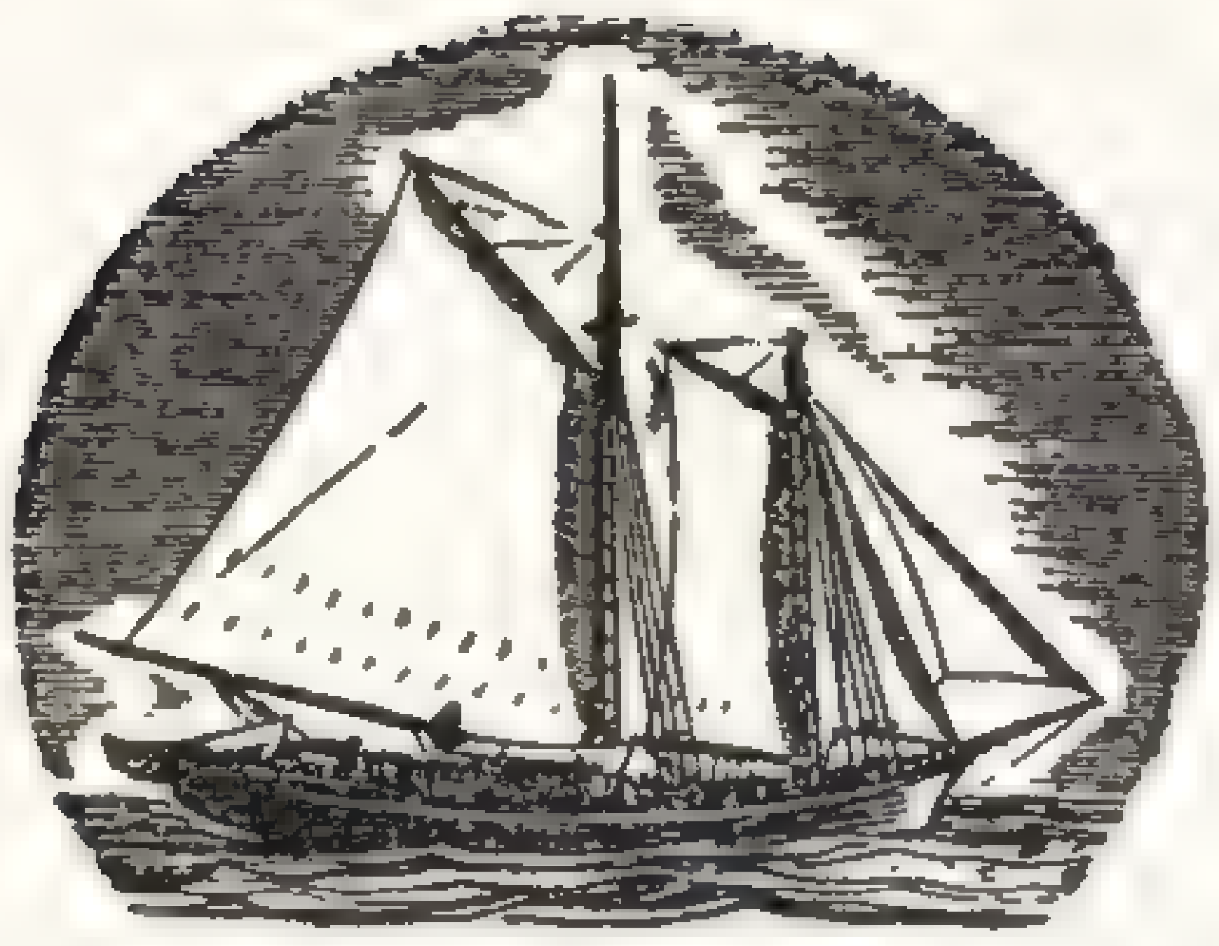
Then Ned turned to Betsy and apologized:

"I look like a scarecrow. Been hurt a trifle. Sick a trifle, worried a heap. My mind felt as if it was slipping. But thank God we had brains enough to pay for a special train from Cuchara."

"Oh, you are back, Ned! Nothing else counts," sobbed the girl. "You were such a brave little boy. Always taking care of me. Oh, my dear, my dear, what have they done to you?"

"They didn't do nothing, miss, to what he done to them." Jo chuckled. Then his expression changed. "Ned Shane . . . Shane. Seems like that used to be *my* name afore I was hurt."

He shook his head slowly and ambled away. One of these days he might recall more clearly—but even then Ned Shane probably would never learn.



KINGDOM

OF THE

SEALS

By LAWRENCE G. GREEN

FOR TWO centuries adventurous seal hunters have fared south of the Roaring Forties to Kerguelen Land—the gale swept Antarctic island which was recently declared by France a national park where seals and penguins may breed undisturbed. Now gunboats from Madagascar will keep poachers away.

Kerguelen is not often in the day's news. Certainly it is far from all liner tracks or tourist routes. To hear of this weird forgotten corner of the world you must listen, as I did, to the yarns of the Norwegians who come to Table Bay.

These Vikings of the South are the real masters of small craft in the world today. For them the stormiest seas hold no terrors. In tiny vessels they dare icebergs and uncharted waters on the most incredibly romantic quests. Right down to the coast of the Antarctic continent they sail in search of whales and seals; and though their exploits rival those of the scientific polar explorers, we hear little of them.

On the bleak beaches of Kerguelen the seals and sea elephants haul up in thousands to breed; and here, year after year, stout little steamers manned by Norwegians have voyaged from Table Bay. Quite recently an oil tanker foundered after striking an uncharted rock off the Kerguelen coast; and it was one of her crew, a fair haired, blue eyed Norseman, who described life in France's new national park to me.

"Down South, where we club the seals, the wind in some places lifts you off your feet," he said. "We are glad to see the huts of the sealing station after a day's work."

He showed me photographs—serrated lines of frowning mountain peaks sweeping down to beaches of gray, volcanic sand, where dark massive shapes cluster at the edge of the foam.

The sealers head their stanch lifeboats boldly into the thunder of the surf, shoot dangerously toward the beach, and jump waist deep into the sea when they reach the shallows to drag the boat ashore. Then there is slaughter, primitive man on the edge of the world clubbing his prey.

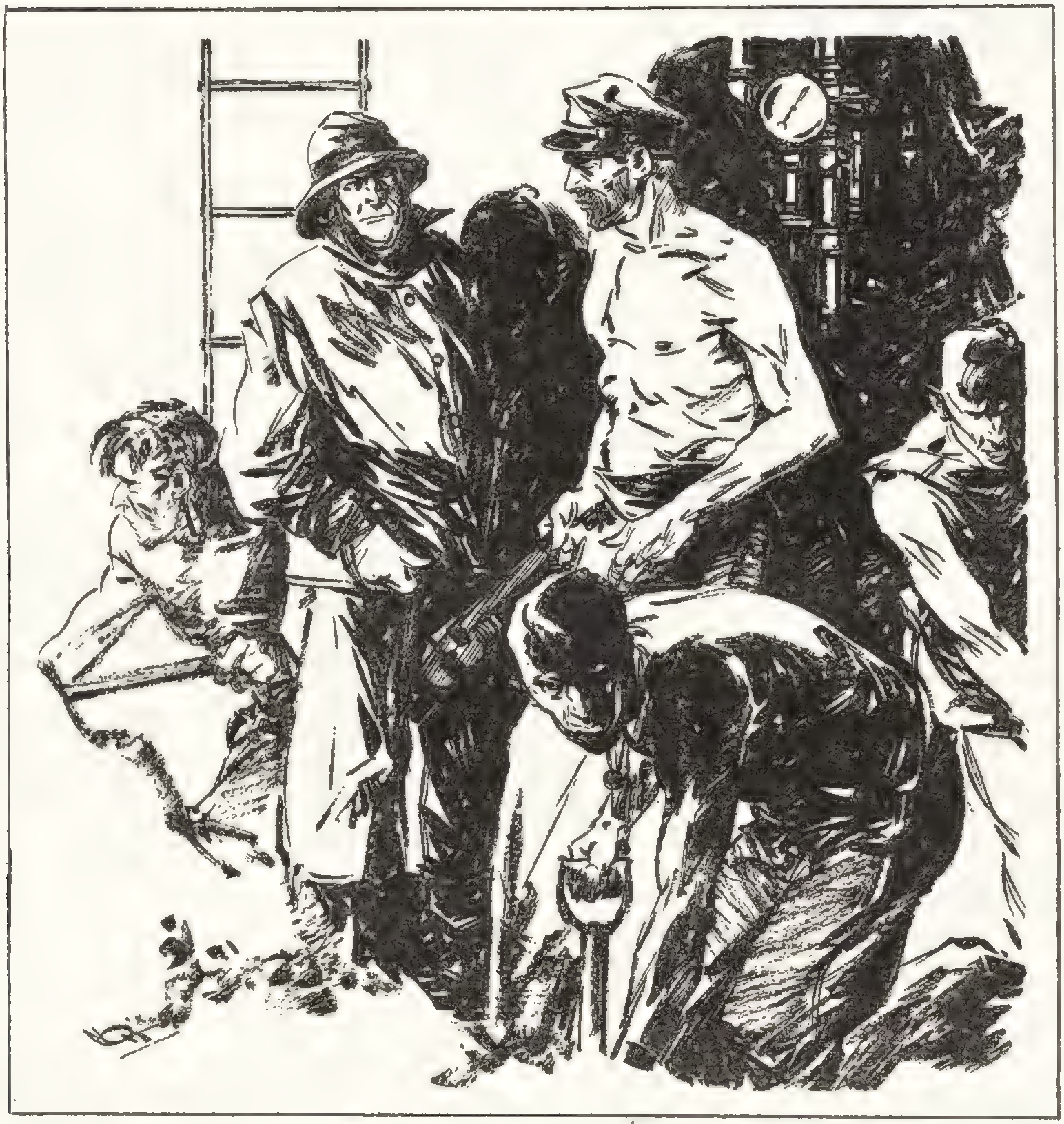
Seals, of course, are docile creatures, and their clumsy attempts to escape are useless. But sea elephants are ferocious; they often weigh a ton, and they will turn and fight. Never a year goes by but some Norwegian hunter is buried on those lonely shores.

Kerguelen is ninety miles long, and everywhere there is evidence of a grim past. Every fjord and bay has its blubber pots, left by the tough New Bedford whalermen years ago, and its graves. There are islands off the mainland dotted with graves. At the place which they call Three Islands more than a hundred Americans are buried—victims of some ill fated expedition.

"The Rhyme of the Three Sealers," one of Kipling's most vigorous works, is an epic of the Bering Sea. Many other such poems might have been written of almost unknown, unexplored Kerguelen on the white fringe of the South, the kingdom now of seals and great penguins.

The MAIN CHANCE

By RALPH R. PERRY



"STEAM'S low, you dirty, misbegotten scum! C'mon, now! Fire up!"

Six feet and two inches of corded muscle, Bill Varney drove the exhausted stokers toward the boilers. In the gloom of the fire room his body, naked to the waist, formed a white blur that was still erect, still forceful, though this was the thirty-fifth consecutive hour of struggle against the might of a North Pacific gale.

His voice was hoarse. A hundred, five hundred times, he had rasped that same order. Stubble had sprouted thick on the third engineer's chin during this thirty-five hour watch. With the forefinger of his left hand he scratched at his jaw; in his right a two-foot Stillson wrench was poised menacingly.

For all its hoarseness, the voice had lost no atom of resolution. Despite the lines that fatigue and mental strain had etched into Varney's lean cheeks, the expression of his face was unaltered.

Those cheeks seemed leaner than they were. Their gauntness, the rawboned power of Varney's torso, his straight, light brown hair and gray-green eyes, were racial characteristics that marked him as one of that breed of seamen, mechanics and adventurers who call New England home. Though Varney's way was to drive straight ahead toward the main chance, he was not cold blooded; though he did what he saw fit without explanation, content to abide by the results, without apology, he was not insensitive. Stoicism was bred in his bone. So was strength.

The thirty-five hour fight with the gale was ending in defeat. The steam gage had dropped ten pounds. Wave and wind and current had been too much for the old tramp steamer *Kennebec*. She was being driven back, back into the maze of islets, reefs and shoals that form the Aleutian Islands. Wreck was almost certain, nor would it be long delayed now. The islands were closed to leeward.

These were the facts, and Bill Varney was not trying to kid himself. If the old *Kennebec* hit the beach no lifeboat would get through the surf. The breakers might fling a man or two ashore—if they were strong men. A woman would never make it. Neither would a man, however strong, carrying a woman. If the *Kennebec* was to be abandoned, the boats had best be launched at once.

Bill's left forefinger scratched the stubble on his jaw. These were facts, yes. But, on the other hand, could the skipper abandon a ship and a cargo of good West Coast lumber in the open sea and never be sure she was wrecked? That was a bitter alternative. The main chance was to buck to windward in the teeth of the gale. That effort was ending in failure, to be sure, but even so Varney saw no reason for relaxing, for losing a single pound of steam voluntarily. He might get the old *Kennebec* out. The gale might go down.

Shafts of ruddy light from the fire doors, suddenly flung open, stabbed the gloom of the stokehold. Sullen and full of hate, half naked men shambled with coal scoops and slice bars toward the fires. The tools seemed to weigh tons, the arms of the stokers to be of lead. Thirty-five hours of desperate labor had dulled their minds to the probability of wreck. Danger and drowning were more remote, more endurable than the ache of overstrained muscles. They hated Varney because he kept them at work, because his Stillson guarded the exit to the fiddley ladder and the lifeboats.

"C'mon, fire up!" Varney rasped. "You, Carlos, you hairy cross of ape and hound, snap into it!"

Carlos—an emaciated giant of a Spaniard whose gaunt shoulders and abnormally long arms were clothed in a mat of black hair coarse and long as that of a dog—still retained strength enough to snarl.

He turned, shovel half raised. The fierce light from the red hot coals revealed retracted lips. The red gleam in his bloodshot eyes was not wholly the reflection of the fire.

"'Ound? *Sangre de Cristo*, me?"

"Yep. You. Fire up, damn you!" snapped Varney.

His will conquered. With a murderous glare Carlos attacked the pile of coal, flung it vengefully into the maw of the furnace, doing the work of three men. The others shoveled with a lethargic swing. They were calloused to the lash of insult. If the steam went down the *Kennebec* would be abandoned so much the sooner. At least their toil would cease.

THEREFORE their heads jerked erect when the chief mate waddled into the stokehold. Among that half naked gathering Eli Peck's oilskins were incongruous. He seemed broader than he was high—a short, roly-poly man of thirty-eight whose layers of fat wrapped a heart as cold as that of a toad. Peck's mouth, and not his double chins, was the clue to his character. In the round half moon of his countenance was a slit surrounded by bloodless lips which he kept compressed so tightly that Varney could barely see the pink at all, but only the soft baby redness of the face. When Peck talked he did not open his mouth. His words squeezed one by one through an orifice which might have been made by a knife blade in a blob of pink putty.

"Guess you're thinkin' of abandonin' ship, bean't ye, Varney?" he said.

"What does the Old Man say?" the third engineer replied, pointedly ignoring the suggestion that he express his own opinion. "And what the hell are you doing in my stokehold? The voice tube from the bridge is working."

The pale blue eyes of the chief mate closed for an instant to show that he ignored the reproof and was going to do what he pleased anyway. Between the two officers an atmosphere of hatred developed like the chill that creeps from the sides of an iceberg into the surrounding atmosphere.

They had been raised in the same town and courted the same girl. Varney disliked the older man for being the shrewd and tricky type of Yankee that turns trader, the type that gave the State of Connecticut its reputation for selling wooden nutmegs. And Peck despised the engineer because Varney was not cunning, because he had won the girl that Peck had wanted and still wanted.

"Cap'n Samuels ain't said nothing. Stands on the bridge with his hands rammed in his pockets and his face wrinkled up like a withered apple. Jest stands and stares, when there ain't nothing to see but damned flying scud and fog. We sent an SOS to the Coast Guard cutter, but how they going to find us when the Almighty can't see two hundred feet? Since then the cap'n ain't done nothing. His wits are addled. On account of his age, and worryin' over the ship—don't ye guess so, Bill?" Peck insinuated.

"He's seventy-five and owns fifteen-sixteen's of her," Varney answered.

The dry tone made the statement of facts a reproof. Because he hated the fat mate he sensed that Peck had a scheme on foot—something sly and indirect that would turn the desperate predicament of the *Kennebec* to the mate's own advantage.

"The ship's all the cap'n does own. He brought his granddaughter abroad this voyage to buy that last sixteenth, because he sold the home farm." The mate's voice pushed hoarsely through the slit of his lips. "The cap'n is thinkin' so hard of his ship he's forgot about her, Varney! Faith Samuels is settin' in the cabin all alone with a life preserver under her oilskins. What's goin' to become of her when we hit the beach? You won't be able to git her through the breakers." Though Peck's voice trembled, the pale, close-set blue eyes never shifted. "She's only twenty, an' the prettiest girl in the State of Maine—"

"Guess I know what Faith looks like, bein' she's gonna marry me," said Varney. "You're hintin' we ought to abandon the *Kennebec* right away. Granting you're right, that's for the deck to decide. Suppose you give the order. I ain't the chief mate."

"Not me," said Peck.

The thin lips shut. A cold and desperate triumph gleamed in the blue eyes, and the pink cheeks quivered and grew white. The sign of intense excitement was repressed instantly, but Varney knew the mate was following what his cold, toad-like mind regarded as the main chance. Though Peck was a trader at heart, he was no coward. For sufficient reward he would gamble all he had on the most desperate venture.

Gently Varney laid the heavy Stillson wrench down to make sure that if he had to hit this rival he would strike only with his fist.

"I'd be willing to sink this ship for one hair off Faith's head," he answered softly. "A hull and a cargo of lumber ain't nothing to a life. But Faith's from seafaring stock. She knows the fix we're in. Let her talk to her grandpop, if she's a mind to."

"She won't."

"Nor I won't. I ain't yellow no more than she is."

"She won't marry a coward, either. I'm not going to be more afraid for her than she is for herself."

Varney's forefinger rasped the stubble on his chin.

"Suppose *you* talk to the cap'n," he sneered. "You courted Faith until she gave you the mitten. Point is, you won't either—because when you said the cap'n's wits were addled, you lied. You came down here, knowing I'm worried, to make me show a yellow streak before Faith and her grandpop. If I step out of his stokehold the steam will go down so we will have to abandon ship. Maybe that's what you want. You want something mean. Now, you get the hell out of here!"

Varney turned decisively. The stokers were listening.

"You damn' crossmated scum, more steam!" he roared. "You, Carlos—"

A jar that shook the ship, a grinding, tearing rumble of rock and sand scraping along the keel, struck the epithet from the engineer's lips. For an instant the deck of the stokehold was canted steeply. The thunder of a wave that broke upon the deck above sounded above the noise of the engines; then the *Kennebec* was lifted bodily by the sea and dropped into the deeper water on the other side of the shoal her keel had scraped.

The stokers held their breath, their eyeballs rolling palely in the gloom. Water black with coal dust licked across the floor plates; the bilge water sloshed into sight because of the deep roll, and the men, in their panic, imagined it the first inrush of a leak which would send the ship down. Shovels and slice bars clanged to the deck. In a shouting mob the stokers ran for the ladder.

"Get back!" Varney shouted.

Two leaps took him to the exit. He whirled. His swinging right fist thudded against Carlos' mouth and knocked the hairy stoker backward; a straight left staggered the second man, but the concerted rush of the others heaved the two dazed men upon him. From behind their bodies, which were held upright by the crowd, fingers clawed at Varney's eyes, a fist beat at his head. Arms went around his chest, around his ankles. He tripped and went down on the narrow iron stairs, still blocking the exit with his body.

Two stokers crawled over him and fled up the ladder. The third Varney gripped and held by the legs; the stoker's struggles to free himself effectively blocked the path of the others. Feet kicked at the engineer's head. He pressed his nose into a stoker's sweaty belly, and wondered why Peck was not pulling the men off him from the rear of the crowd.

The pressure did ease somewhat, but not for that reason. Carlos squirmed sidewise out of the heap, and Varney was able to slide down to the last step. Raising the whole mass of men with him, he pulled himself first to a sitting posture, then on to his feet.

As his head emerged he saw Peck standing like a spectator. Carlos caught up a shovel. Still the mate did not move, and Varney, held in the mass of wrestling stokers, could not dodge the blow. Turtlewise, he tried to draw his head in. The impact of the shovel was a flash of crimson fire. His knees buckled, and he slipped into semi-unconsciousness, barely feeling the feet that trampled across his body as the stokehold emptied up the iron stairs.

HE WAS conscious when the chief engineer ran in.

"Where's Peck?" he asked dully, dragged himself upright, and stood, swaying and staggering because his head still whirled round and round.

"Gone—if he was here. I didn't see him," snapped the chief. "Never mind if they rushed you, Bill. Skipper's just ordered us to abandon ship. Say, your head's cut. Want us to carry you?"

"Carlos smacked me with the flat of the shovel blade. 'Tain't nothing," Varney growled. "I'd like help in drawing the fires, though."

"Sure!" The chief grabbed a bar and went to work. "What was Peck doing below?" he demanded over his shoulder.

"I'd give a lot if I knew—exactly what," Varney answered. "He wanted the ship to be abandoned. Damned bad. But he wasn't scared."

Any hope Varney cherished that the abandonment of the *Kennebec* would be orderly or safe vanished when he stepped out on the topside. The gale blew with sustained and passionate fury. The steady pressure of the wind took away his breath, and the first touch chilled his half clad body to the bone. Fog and spray wrapped the ship in a white shroud through which charged relentless, gray-white seas. The stokers were fighting like beasts to remove the tarpaulin of the leeward lifeboat.

"Better get a coat, Bill, dear," said Faith in Varney's ear.

The head of the captain's granddaughter came halfway between his elbow and shoulder. Her hair was a smooth cap of gold, her eyes a clear dark blue. She wiped the drops of water from her face with the back of her hand—an unhurried gesture, intentionally calm.

Though any woman is a handicap in a crisis, Faith was determined not to handicap her lover or her grandfather by excitement. She had flung away her hat because she wanted to see. The lash of the gale was stimulating and in keeping with her mood. Anxiety, fear for herself and greater fear for the safety of others, were kneading her heartstrings, but toward Varney she turned the face that seemed anxious only because he bled and shivered with cold.

"That the best you can say? Damn it, I love you," he told her roughly. "To hell with a coat till I get you in that boat."

He would have rushed among the stokers, but she barred his way. With the back of her hand she wiped her eyes clear.

"I go into no boat without you. And that's that," she answered. "Of course, we'll both have to leave—before grandpop. He's cap'n."

Varney lifted her by the elbows and set her down out of his path. She was a feather for his strength, yet, though he was quick, he was gentle.

"Quit arguin' and let me do as I think best," he said.

He was running down the deck to beat a mob into discipline with his two fists when a tragedy occurred that was horrible because of its futility and unreason.

The two lifeboats of the *Kennebec* provided room enough for all, but as the leeward boat, which would be less difficult to lower in the heavy sea, was swung over the side Carlos broke through the milling crowd of stokers and seamen and leaped into it. The gaunt stoker was assigned to the other boat, and the man whose seat Carlos took tried to drag him out.

Carlos caught up a heavy piece of wood and stretched the sailor senseless on the wet deck. Before Varney could intervene the men who belonged in the boat struck right and left to keep the others back, and leaped for their own places. The men they struck leaped after them. Twenty men, biting, kicking and punching, piled into a boat designed for fourteen. The hook on the after tackle snapped, and the stern of the boat dropped into the sea, spilling out part of the load.

Of the twenty men a dozen managed to hold on to the thwarts and to climb back to the ship by way of the forward falls. Varney rescued four more with a rope, hauling them hand over hand up the ship's side. But the remaining four drowned, and the big seas smashed the dangling lifeboat into a bundle of splintered planks.

Pale with fury, Varney kicked the survivors to their feet. They huddled before him like wet puppies. He wanted to find Carlos and wring the gaunt stoker's neck. His hands were crooked for the job, but Carlos was one of the four who had not returned. With unabated fury the half clad engineer turned on Peck.

"Why didn't you stop that fight before it started?" he roared.

"Your men started it, Bill," retorted the first mate.

He had intended that the launching should be hurried and confused, but he had not dreamed of a panic, and was appalled by the results. His fat cheeks were trembling like jelly.

"That Carlos was so afraid he'd get drowned that he—"

"Well, he's gone now!" Varney snapped. "How are we going to get Faith off with a crew that's scared blind and weak as kittens? Don't you want her off? You want something!"

"You bet she gets off!" Peck spat through the slit of his lips. He had planned Faith's rescue, and he stuck his chin toward the angry engineer as a challenge for a blow. "Watch me if you think I'm yellow. You engineers have done all you can. Go hold on to your girl. Put her in the boat when I tell ye to, and brag how ye saved her when ye get ashore!"

Turning his back on the engineer—which required a calculating kind of courage—the chief mate herded the crew toward the remaining lifeboat. Skilfully he swung the boat out and seated the crew on the thwarts.

"You and your girl can step in," he said then, and sneered as Varney and Faith marched past him.

They had stood aside while he carried out a difficult task; they were moving tamely toward safety while he remained on the ship; Varney's men had rushed from the stokehold and wrecked a lifeboat, while Peck's had stuck to their job. The twist of Peck's thin white lips implied all these things so unmistakably that Varney flushed and glanced at Captain Eric Samuels, who was walking from the bridge with the *Kennebec's* papers.

Age had withered Captain Samuels' face and shrunk a figure once gigantic to six feet of wrinkled skin and loosely knit sinew and bone. Rheumatism had stiffened him. He shuffled down the deck, dragging his left foot sidewise over the slippery wet planks. He stopped beside the lifeboat and spat a spray of tobacco juice from toothless gums. Every move was without haste. If he perceived the tense attitudes of Peck and Varney, no sign of the fact showed on the withered apple of his countenance. Samuels' brown eyes had surveyed the violence of ocean and mankind for nearly four-score years. This last exhibition left him unmoved. He handed the papers to his granddaughter.

"Keep these, Faith. Ye're spryer than I be, 'n' like to be better looked after."

"You're coming with us, grandpop?" Faith's hand, reaching for the papers, clutched the aged man's rheumatic fingers.

"Ain't a mite romantic at my time of life," Samuels denied with curt cheerfulness. "Any skipper's a fool to go down with his ship when he can't accomplish nothing, and besides, the *Kennebec* ain't goin' t'sink, bein' loaded with lumber like 'tis. You set in the boat, gal."

"Get in yourself, Cap'n. I'll lower the boat for you," Varney volunteered.

A premonition that the old skipper had a plan of action both explicit and unusual made the engineer push him toward the boat. Peck's eyes, Varney noticed, were narrowed, as though the chief mate had received the same impression and did not like it. Samuels' wrinkled face looked expressionless, yet Varney believed the old man was acting to deceive his granddaughter. Under that wrinkled mask the engineer detected a sardonic amusement directed both at himself and the chief mate. He did not like it. Whatever old Samuels planned would affect him, and Varney preferred to look after himself unaided.

"Set where ye be," said the old man in refusal of his offer. "Guess I'll be the last off the ship. Wish this fog would lift. That Coast Guard cutter's somewhere about, but how's she going to find us in this smother?"

"Where is she?" called Peck.

"Gives the same latitude and longitude I figure we're at. To the dot. But ye don't see her, do ye?" retorted the old man dryly. "I also figure we're only two miles from Aimkah Island. So lower away, Peck, before we drift on to a shoal a damn' sight worse than the last one."

THE OLD MAN stepped to the after boat falls, Peck to the forward falls. Working carefully and together, they lowered the boat toward foaming gray seas that leaped to receive it. Varney held his breath. The moment the boat struck the water he would have to unhook the falls; the captain would have to slide down the ropes in the second or two before the lifeboat pulled away from the ship's side. Varney wondered if Samuels' rheumatic muscles would be quick enough for the feat.

A dash of spray drenched the engineer. The fall came loose in his hand; the crew grunted at the oars. The boat was clear —but neither at stern or bow had a man leaped into her. Faith jumped up.

"Grandpop," she shrilled. "Oh, Varney—go back. Grandpop can jump now if we row close."

"Aye," snapped the engineer.

He swung the boat toward the ship, but his forefinger was rasping his jaw. Rescue would not be so simple, for not one man had remained on the *Kennebec*, but two. Here was no mischance due to the stiffness of aged muscles, but deliberate, forethoughtful design. Samuels and Peck stood on the *Kennebec's* deck. In anger and in consternation they glared at one another.

"Jump, grandpop—we can't leave you," screamed Faith.

"Ye must!" called the old man sternly. "I won't desert my ship and let some sailor man make a pauper of ye by means of a salvage claim, girl. Pick up Mr. Peck and row on. I'm an old man and ain't actin' hasty, Faith. I don't see fit to leave."

Beside the old skipper Peck folded his arms.

"I ain't leaving, neither," he announced. "Varney, you take Faith away and stop her screeching."

"Be quiet, Faith," commanded the tall engineer.

He rose in the lifeboat, bare to the waist, but no longer feeling the cold. Anger warmed his blood—anger, and a grim pride that he had encountered rivals worthy of his mettle. He admired the old captain and Peck also, for despite the callous selfishness of the fat mate's motives, he also had decided to gamble his life on the possibility that the Coast Guard cutter could find and take the *Kennebec* in tow before the steamer drifted on to the beach.

Overhead the fog was beginning to thin out, but near the water the mist and spray were still impenetrably thick. Varney stood poised as the lifeboat pitched over the long seas. He barely felt Faith's hands clutching at his knees, barely understood her plea.

"Don't let them—don't let them," she was saying over and over.

How could he stop them? Their objectives were becoming plain. His own choice was still foggy in Varney's mind. Captain Samuels' decision was right and proper. The old man had little to live for except the future of his granddaughter. Rather than risk the fruits of a lifetime of labor he was eager to sacrifice a few doddering years of existence, and while he remained aboard the salvage claims against the *Kennebec* would be moderate. Another man, two other men, aboard, would make little difference either in law or in the case of rescue.

Peck had simply seized an opportunity. Jilted and penniless now, if he were able to save the *Kennebec* single handed he would be well to do. Though Captain Samuels' presence minimized his chances of financial gain, he would still be able to press a claim against Faith and the old man. Peck wanted to marry her. He had remained behind to protect her property and her grandfather's life, and if he insisted upon it, Faith might feel herself bound to reward him.

For Varney the issue was not so plain. Faith's voice urged him to interfere, but her fingers were twisted in the wet cloth of his dungarees, holding him in the lifeboat. She loved him. The fate of the lifeboat was in doubt. Varney did not want to entrust her safety to an exhausted and badly frightened boat crew, which might well have to labor at the oars for hours or days before the gale subsided. She was not only all important to him, but Samuels had made her his responsibility. The younger and stronger man was to look after the girl; the older to protect the ship. Such was the main chance as Samuels conceived it, and such the cold logic of the situation.

But the tight lipped triumph on Peck's fat face made Varney forget logic. The others might plan coldly. He could not. Gently he unclasped Faith's fingers.

"I'll have to heave them overboard, likely. Stay close," he said reassuringly, and dived from the lifeboat into the side of a curling, gray-white comber.

A dozen powerful strokes took him to one of the ropes still trailing over the *Kennebec's* side, but before he could climb far a wave dashed him against the iron plates. The breath was knocked from his ribs. He clung a yard above the water, able to hold on, but not to advance. Over his head Samuels tugged on the rope, only to find Varney's weight too much for his strength.

"Peck!" shrilled the skipper.

"Comin'," grunted the chief mate, but he moved at a walk.

Faith, sensing that he meant to come too late, screamed. Varney heard her, though his head was ringing, and the black side of the *Kennebec* seemed to be whirling round and round. He struggled upward a foot. Another sea covered him, but mercifully the second shock was not severe. His hand, groping blindly above him, touched the wood of the rail as well as the rope. His wrist was clutched. With a convulsive effort he scrambled upward, and Samuels dragged him on to the deck. For a moment Varney lay in a heap while he waited for the ship to stop spinning around with him. When his senses cleared he rose slowly and staggered toward Samuels.

Weak as he was, he could overpower the old man. Peck would come later, as his strength returned.

His intention must have been apparent in his eyes, for Samuels backed away.

"No ye don't! I ain't going, I tell ye!" he cried out. "I'll lock myself in the cabin!"

"Faith wants you," Varney panted.

Out of the corner of his eyes he could see Peck. The mate's fists were doubled, and there was no longer a smile on the thin lips.

"You old fool—jump or you'll drown the three of us!"

VARNEY expected Peck to grapple him. Probably the mate could throw him back into the sea, but the engineer believed he had recovered strength enough to take the mate with him.

"You fool, Peck's doublecrossing us both!" he panted, lunging to overtake Samuels.

If the skipper once retreated into the cabin, where they would be out of sight from the lifeboat, Peck might make his attack with a club and tumble them both into the sea, unconscious.

Peck was that sort, and who could prove anything later? Under his breath Varney cursed Samuels for a dogged old gaffer who had not room in his head for more than one idea at a time. Could he not see he would be helpless in the mate's hands? Did he not know Faith wanted him alive more than she wanted the ship? Samuels and Peck were alike. To them money was the main chance. They were fools.

Varney tried to force some speed into his trembling knees, but Samuels eluded him, and Peck followed on tiptoe, fists clenched. The engineer could hear the mate's excited breathing. The flesh of his back crawled, and he ran with shoulders hunched to protect his head.

They were at the door leading to the cabin when Samuels stopped short.

"The fog's lifting!" he shouted, and whirled, one arm pointing to windward.

Varney caught the old man around the waist and, as Peck collided with him from behind, whipped a long arm around the mate's neck.

"Got you both!" the engineer panted. But, relieved from the fear of a treacherous blow, he was content to cling to the two while he watched the swift transformation of the weather.

In shreds and hanks of vapor the fog was blown from the sea. Overhead the sun burst through the clouds. In two minutes the ocean was changed from leaden gray and white to foam smeared blue. Five miles to windward the Coast Guard cutter swayed on the crests of long combers. The gale snatched the smoke from her stack. Spray flashed in the sun. Far away the water boiled white over the reef where the *Kennebec* had touched.

To leeward lay an unbroken line of islands where the blue sea died in spouts of white. Six miles or so away, Varney judged. With luck the cutter might still overtake the drifting *Kennebec*.

"If we had steam—" he cried.

"Ain't taking Faith and the crew back aboard on that chance," said Samuels curtly. "We'd been goners if the fog hadn't cleared. As it is—better get into the boat, you two!"

"Not me!" said Peck.

Varney shook his head and grinned.

"You're a mite old to be handling a towing hawser alone, Cap'n," he remarked softly. "The lifeboat will be picked up now, for certain, so we might as well save this ship. Mr. Peck don't look too pleased to have help."

"Shut up!" snarled the mate.

"When that's finished," Varney continued imperturbably, "I'm going to knock his block off. To pay up for getting me crashed with a shovel, and other things."

Peck twisted out of the engineer's grip and walked toward the forecastle.

"Kind of peeved, ain't he?" remarked Varney, with a Yankee's deliberate understatement.

Peck looked murderous.

"Why shouldn't he be? He's going to lose plenty," retorted Samuels with equal restraint. "He might have won a ship, and all he'll git is a black eye. Bung up his eyes good, Varney, and I'll overlook your callin' me a fool. He's tricky."

"You were a fool."

"Yep. So were you. So's Peck. What of it? If everybody was sensible there'd be damn' little fun and damn' little profit," Samuels snorted. "Carlos was the biggest fool. He wouldn't wait or use his head. Now go put on some clothes. Nothing's going to happen for an hour."

And indeed the *Kennebec* had drifted close to the breakers before the Coast Guard cutter came close enough to shoot a line aboard the steamer. The gale still blew without cessation, and whether a towing line could be passed successfully, or whether the *Kennebec* could be towed out to sea afterward, were questions without an answer.

Captain Samuels gnawed at a plug of tobacco and made mental calculations, punctuated with grunts. What would the tow cost? What would happen when the towline tautened? Certainly the *Kennebec* would take green water over her forecastle head. She would be battered above as well as below. Have to be drydocked. He could find the money somehow, he guessed.

Peck, a little apart from the others, stood with arms folded to hide the shaking of his hands. He shrank from what he meant to do. He speculated whether he dared to do it. The consequences of detection appalled him. And yet, there still remained a way to his goal. A desperate way, but little more desperate than his decision to remain with the steamer. If he got the chance—

He got it. The devil never engineered a better opportunity.

Varney and Samuels snatched up the line flung by the cutter's Lyle gun and hauled in hand over hand. The line drew a heavy towing hawser across the two hundred yards of sea separating the two ships, and soon they called Peck to help them. The three hauled the hawser from the sea, flung it over the bitts and signaled the cutter to start towing. They were all on the forecastle, breathing hard, when the cutter pulled the *Kennebec's* bow into a long, smooth sided comber that was the granddaddy of all the waves in that gale. Green water cascaded over the bulwarks and swept all three men aft with its rush.

Samuels had his wind knocked out by the fall from the forecastle head to the forward well deck. Varney was half stunned, but Peck fell on his feet. He caught the rail and held himself erect while the water swirled around his knees. The flood washed Varney across the deck and rolled him into the waterways, where he lay groaning, with his head against the mate's boat. Samuels lay draped limply around the butt of the foremast. He was helpless. He blinked and pointed to his chest to indicate his wind was gone. Peck looked around. The forecastle hid all three from the cutter. Slowly the mate drew back his foot and kicked with all his force at Varney's forehead.

After the wave swept Varney from his feet the engineer was conscious of two shocks. One he could understand. The impact of his head against the deck as he tumbled from the forecastle left him silly. With just sense enough left to hold his breath he let the water roll him across the deck. Then there was a second shock—an impact that cut his forehead. He could not figure out what it was, but instinct made him roll over and over out of reach, and rise with his arms covering his head and wind.

Peck battered at him with both hands. Exquisite pain from a kick in the shin tore up his leg like a white hot knife blade. Varney clinched.

He could not pinion Peck entirely. Short arm blows jolted against his chest and stomach, but he leaned with all his weight against the shorter man and wrapped long arms about him to prevent a knockout punch. Gradually Varney's head cleared. His left hand closed on Peck's collar. He thrust the mate to the length of a long arm and hooked his right fist to the fat jaw. Peck was knocked out. Varney let him slump to the deck as he would have relinquished his grip on the neck of a dead cat.

"Well, you fat, murdering rat," he said. "You were ready to go all the way through, weren't you?"

He gave the unconscious mate one kick—thoughtfully, in the chest where the toe of his shoe would bruise. His intention was to insult, not cripple; for the jerking and pitching of the *Kennebec* was evidence that the tow line had held, and Varney knew he would need the mate later to help the stokers with the fires.

"I seen him when he kicked ye," old Samuels piped breathlessly. "I'll lay a charge of mutiny and take away his ticket. I'll—"

"You'll do nothing. Ain't he from our home town, where Faith will have to neighbor with his folks?" said Varney. "Haven't you any sense, Cap'n?"

Beneath the maze of wrinkles which covered his dried apple of a face, Eric Samuels blushed.

"Anyhow I saved the value of ship and cargo," he retorted defensively.

"Yeah, that's all right, now it's done. But I guess you're getting old, Cap'n," Varney said.

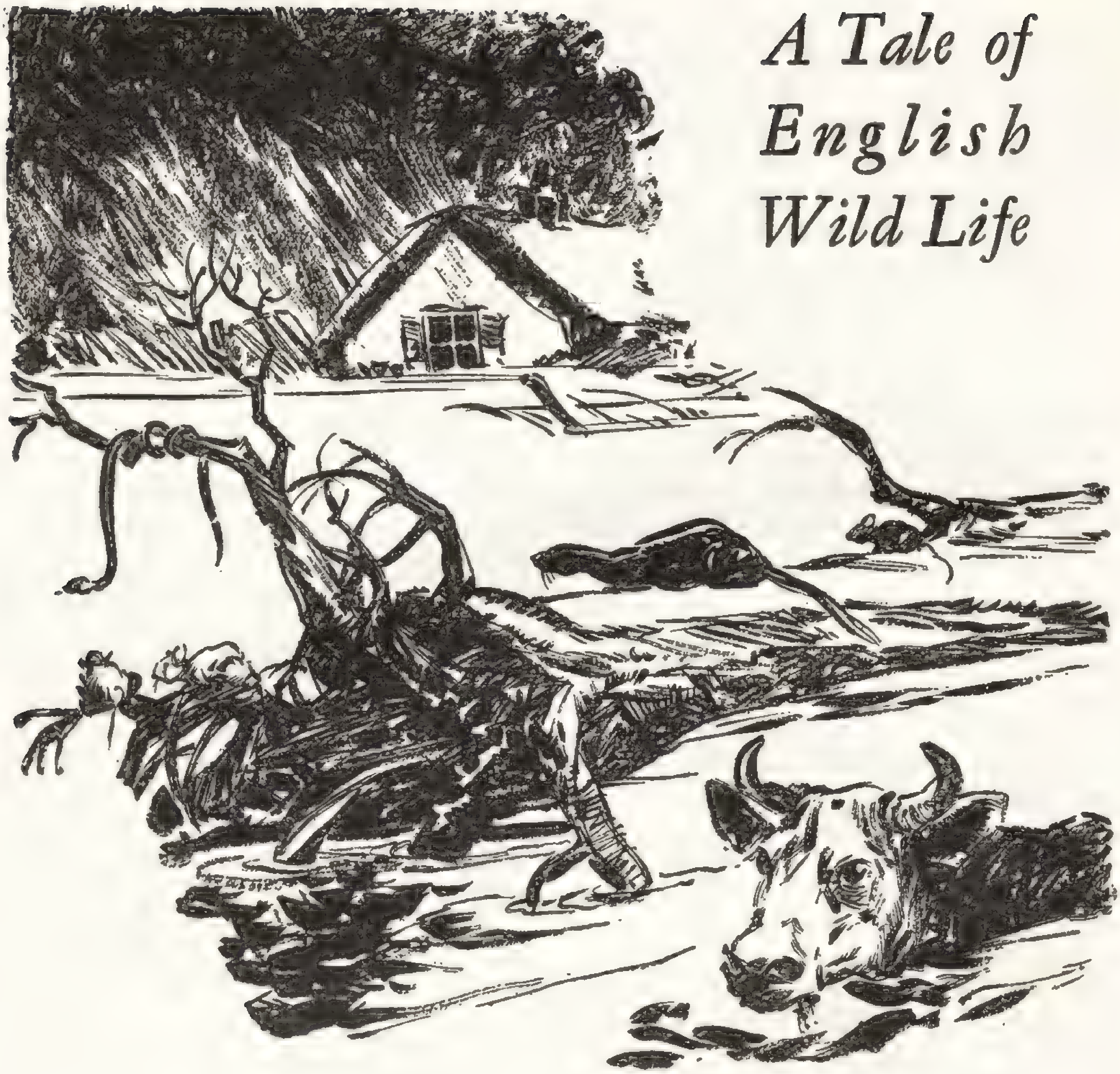
He was thinking of the clutch of Faith's fingers as they twisted in his dungarees. Holding fast to him, holding him where he was safe.

"Folks differ in their ideas of what the real important thing is. Can't know for certain, I guess, until the whole thing's finished."

Varney shrugged.

"We better pick up that lifeboat," he added. "It will save towing charges if we can make steam."

Varney wanted his girl back, but he felt compelled to offer a practical reason for bringing her aboard. He neither deceived Samuels, nor intended to. It was their way. Throughout the crisis both had thought of her, and not themselves.



A Tale of English Wild Life

The AWAKENING

By F. ST. MARS

That flood strewed wrecks upon the grass,
That ebb swept out the flocks to sea.

EVEN with one's eyes shut, one could have told by the peculiar silence what the trouble was—snow. Snow smothered the land, which seemed to crouch under the winter ban.

There was no ice on the water, except in the windless places, but the wind seemed cold enough to freeze the heartsome hearts. Even the birds went about like people in a sickroom, with claw to beak, so to speak, and if any animals went about too, they, most of them, managed to do it when no one was looking—all save one.

The weasel came along the river bank with his little, odd, sidelong hop that alone would have marked him—him and his cousin stoat. Being a weasel, he did not say what he was coming for; but it was superfluous. Would a weasel come for anything else save blood—or play? Yes, I will give him credit for that—play. He needs a good word.

And the weasel popped into a hole; at least, he was gone, and one knew that hole-popping—other people's holes—was what Nature designed and cut him out for.

Microtus, in the shape of a round ball, all dark brown fur, and nothing else that one could see, was asleep in his hole, in his dry bed in the middle of his hole, when the weasel entered. Yet it seemed as if he went out of his back door as the weasel came in at the front door. This can only have been apparently so, however, though no one, I believe, has ever seen Microtus asleep. His registration card, by the way, said Mr. Microtus Amphibius, but he was quite satisfied if you only called him water vole, and most dissatisfied if you dared to call him water rat, which was a libel to boot.

I don't think the weasel ever expected any better luck, for he was a weasel of experience. He pranced up the foot or so of shallow straight tunnel to a fork, danced up the left turning for a foot, and found it a "blind", then came back and galloped about a foot down the right hand turning, and—help! He was in water up to his tail, sliding down a muddy tunnel, a chute, smooth as glass, down, down, in darkness that he could almost feel, claws digging madly to obtain a hold that could not exist in that slippery underwater shaft, till, all spreadeagled and very much amazed, he was shot out into the river far beneath the surface, which he could see as a pale green-gold circle above.

Well, see here; he had forgotten in his fury that water voles drive the entrance to their shafts as much below water as above. He remembered the fact now; only, as he was not constructed as a submersible, simply as a surfacer aft, so to speak, he felt in his lungs that the quicker he got to the surface the better.

Wherefore, he shot upward, all legs going wildly—and hang Microtus for the present—thrusting his head up to take the air as he reached the surface to breathe? No, sirs— *Bump!* Yes, that was it—*bump!* His flat, wedge shaped crown, his sensitive nose, struck not air, but ice.

He had come up under a stretch of the ice which, as has been said, was forming in the windless reaches.

I am not even going to suggest that Microtus—even plus his gray hairs—purposely tempted him there, because I do not know. The result was the same, anyway—a weasel with his eyes popping and his lungs bursting, or feeling like it, swimming desperately along under the ice, looking for air. He would not, as a matter of fact, have had to go more than a few yards in any direction before coming to open water, and he could easily have got there before drowning, if—

There was a flash, a gleam, a glimpse, no more—nay, the half of a glimpse—of a long, narrow, torpedo shaped body; a clash of horny jaws and glistening fangs; a streak of white, as the weasel writhed upon himself, and a chain of bubbles, and two big globules joined together, that were the weasel and a big pike, fading down, down into the black-green mystery of the depths.

The pike had been lying at the surface, under the ice, motionless, near a thin spot among the cottony looking brittle rushes, when the weasel had appeared from nowhere. All is fish that cometh unto the pike's jaws, and never having had a chance of tasting weasel up to date, he made the best of his opportunity to remedy the omission.

And Microtus, calmly seated, all hunched and ball-like, upon one of his wonderful water vole's overhanging balconies along the bank, watched him do it. He knew all about that pike; where his "swim", where his thin place in the ice, where his lair under the bank. It was his business to know. He would not have been alive, else.

Microtus, however, did not look as if he were even thinking about weasel or pike. He had done with the two evils for the moment and devoutly hoped they had done for each other and with him.

Having been wakened up at all made him think about food. In that cold one could not well do anything else. The problem, however, was to find it.

His main food, his staff of life, so to speak, grass, was under the snow. He could reach it by burrowing. He was always burrowing at something, and snow was easy. But grass under snow did not seem to appeal just then. He would try bark.

When you order bark for dinner, if you are a water vole, you run out along a bough—in this case an alder—overhanging, preferably, the water, and you sit you down, quite aware that your little round, dark body is a mark, upon the white draped slender stems, for any hidden, hungry eyes—and there are usually hungry eyes looking for water voles—that may be loafing around.

Microtus was quite aware of this little fact, but he chipped bark with his chisel teeth as unconcernedly as if he had been safe in a cage. Soon he ran down a branch that dipped its fingers in the stream and scooped out an acorn from some floating raffle of the river that had caught up and collected among the twigs. Sitting upon his haunches, with his back bent into a bow, he held the acorn in his little hand-like forepaws, stripping the husk from the base end and feasting on the contents.

But he quickly dropped this—most rodents are the most restless of feeders—to scoop up a stalk of wintercress that had floated down, but dropped that again after twenty seconds, to dive for grass roots growing along the bank, and in thirty seconds more reappeared with a freshwater mussel that had been torn from the mud somewhere by a winter flood. But when he looked up he saw another water vole—around, squat silhouette against the sullen sky—above him on the bank.

NOW, in water vole society, each male water vole's house is supposed to be his castle, and the grounds thereof and immediate vicinity his very own hunting domain; and it is not considered etiquette to trespass, unless, indeed, you are a lady of that ilk, and then, I presume, you can do as you please, unless the person that catches you happens to be of the gentler sex too.

Be that as it may, Microtus saw that he was looking at a member of his own sex, and one who was of age, too, and he felt that his personal honor was affronted thereby; especially as this spot was right in the heart of his own ground, so to speak.

He dived, therefore, without a sound, and landed again nearly without a sound, and went up the bank like a clockwork tortoise as much as anything else, only to find that the other water vole had vanished, and that a scowling visaged, fierce eyed, heavily armed kestrel falcon, with all brakes on—wings and tail fanned—had taken his place.

That was one narrow squeak, and Microtus, who rolled twice over, gave one hop, and landed at the end of that hop—like a billard ball into a pocket—into his hole, and did not want another.

He got it though, and at once, for he was no more than just turning the corner of his burrow—one of his burrows—into the passage leading to the water, when the other water vole jumped at him out of the dark, and from behind, out of the blind passage which forked off at this point.

The little sensitive oar blade at the tip of Microtus' tail, however, must have saved him; otherwise the other would have landed upon his back, and that, in the wild, is the strangle hold. As it was, Microtus felt the attack he could not see and, in that fractional atom of a second allowed, miraculously contrived to spin himself about on a lightning right-about-face, so that the other, expecting to chisel with his front incisors—which are the same to water voles and all rodents as fangs are to other beasts—through fur and skin to spine, got a terrible jar when his front teeth met only front teeth, and his throat felt claws, little, but scratching with the rapidity of a sewing machine needle.

That fight, down there in the dark, was as a fight, a fraud. Neither of them had any chance of downing his foe without getting more or less injured, and wild animals, as a rule, do not care to fight on those terms. They can not afford to. It isn't business, since an injury may be as good as death to them in the end. So they just sparred and sparred, and went each his way, hoping for a better chance later.

Microtus saw the intruder off, then turned, dropped his blunt nose, and stopped dead. He had just learned the meaning of the trespass. He was smelling water vole's trail, but neither his own trail, nor the invader's trail, nor any other with which he was acquainted and he knew by scent alone, I fancy, most of his neighbors.

This trail was that of a female of his kind, a young female of his kind, a "flapper". He knew of no unmarried flappers about—and he should know, for he had explored enough, always to learn the truth duly impressed and impressive, from the teeth of husbands. Therefore he concluded—and he may have been able to tell by the scent, for all I know—that this, this lovely one—all young females are lovely in the eyes of their wild male friends—was a new importation, on her own, and lonely. Microtus did not see any reason why she should be alone any longer.

Apparently this wandering beauty without a home had come through the burrow and gone down the tunnel—chute, Microtus had made it—that came out beneath the surface. And she must have been within the portals all the time, for as Microtus hurried down the tunnel he heard her leave at the lower end.

Certainly the weather did not invite love in the wild, but Christmas is barely over before you will find birds more noticeably in pairs, and down there in the warm tunnels, I fear that there was not a great part of the year when Cupid and Microtus were parted.

Microtus let himself go down the chute, hit the water that half filled it, went under, shot out at the lower end into and under the surface of the river, and fairly barged, full smack, bang into the pike!

It was the fright of his life almost—but he had had so many that one could never be sure.

Then he got the surprise of his life also—for he lived.

He actually turned a complete somersault under the belly of the big fish, with all the wind knocked out of him, and swam to the surface for air—above! Even he, I think, could scarcely believe it, for by all the rules of the game, as those two had played it for months, the pike ought to have halved him with one chop.

Instead, I don't think the fish even looked back with his expressionless, staring eyes, to see what he had hit. He seemed to be in no end of a hurry, that big devil pike, and had hurtled past the hole and on downstream like a green-black waving line.

The water vole had never in all the hectic acquaintance known the fish to act that way, but he had scarcely broke the surface film to "lung up" before he knew the reason why.

You could see a green-black bubble dissolving ahead of him, could Microtus, and that was the flapper water vole, but she was not the reason. Microtus could feel the reason in his tail, and it electrified him.

He could not steer well, did not answer properly to his helm. Mariners will know the feeling of the wheel in a following sea. It was the same with Microtus. That river was following him down faster than he had ever known it, a darn' sight too fast.

As he lifted his head he could hear the ice in the windless reaches going to pieces like shattering grass, and voices, many and little, of water beginning to talk along the banks. Two stranger water voles passed him, swimming hard, and as he dived after his young lady, he perhaps knew what had brought her there too.

Under water, Microtus changed shape instantly. He became simply a big bubble to look at from above, a bubble which faded even as you watched. That was because of the dozens upon dozens of tiny air bubbles which were caught up between the long gray hairs of his outer coat and the close, short pile of his under fur. He was not only dressed in a thick fur waterproof, but that same made him all but invisible. The air bubbles acted as a mirror. They reflected his surroundings, in that case green-black, so that he too appeared green-black as part of the said surroundings. If they had been gold, he would have looked golden.

Under water, too, he was deaf. There is no sound, much, anyway, and besides that Microtus had a patent valve arrangement fitted to each ear, which when closed, kept the water out—sort of ship's scuppers. Otherwise, he would have heard the sound that had grown—nothing else expresses it—into the air. It was as if a rough sea were driving over a bar, a steady, dry, sky filling roar. But there was no sea in miles. It could not be that.

Microtus, steadily following the black-green bubble through the black-green murk in front of him, found that she quickly began to head back to land, about the time that he found that his own tail had developed an inclination to catch him up, and he discovered considerable difficulty—with his unwebbed feet—in keeping himself from turning broadside on, or being turned so by the water, rather.

As he followed her up the bank, he may, or may not, have noticed that water vole holes, which had been above high-water mark when he first awoke that afternoon, were now below it, and the nearly silent river then had developed now an ugly snarl.

* * *

UPON the top of a highish knoll along the bank he caught up to her, on her haunches, staring upstream. She was, or ought to have been, a surprise to him, because she was quite black, and he had never seen a black water vole in all his life before. But what probably did surprise him was that she took not the slightest notice of him. She appeared too busy staring upstream.

For the first time then, I think, he must have noticed the harsh, deep roar that seemed to fill the world, for he too sat on his haunches—right up, like a dog begging—and stared upstream. Then he shivered.

The tender dusk had cast her spell over all that scene of pure white, and her gray cloak was drawing swiftly over the hollows and damp places—turning them to a wonderful blue under the light of a single flaming spear in the western horizon.

But Microtus had eyes for none of these things. He was looking up the river, beyond a bend, where his astonished gaze beheld the white and riven crest of a single solid wall of water sweeping swiftly along. It swung the bend, going out on the outer side in a cloud of spray and, with a suddenly released thunder, hurried on downstream—"gray, formless, enormous and growing"—toward them. And it stood erect, like a live thing, above the banks as it came.

Microtus knew not that a dam had burst upstream, cracked or percolated, undermined by frost or snow, and that a very considerable sized pond was coming downstream in one lump! He only knew that he knew fear; and instinct, taking charge, did the rest.

Instinct sent him scuttering across the snow—running the gauntlet of a white owl afar off, who gave chase, swinging along at the rate of knots—to an old and bent, knotted, hollow willow tree. Instinct sent him up the inside of that tree, climbing as never he had climbed before. Instinct drew the female water vole after him, as if he towed her with ropes.

Arrived at the top, the pollarded knob, Microtus peeped out of a hole upon the white world, peopled with gray shadows of dusk, and he just had time to see several things happening very quickly, and almost at once. A moor hen scurried from a patch of cottony topped dead reeds and, rising, fled; a trout of seven pounds hurtled downstream like a silver bolt; then an otter dived along close under the bank at a tremendous pace; several water voles' blackish heads broke the surface, swimming madly at the apex of arrow shaped ripples, but too late; and the gentleman water vole with whom he had already held argument popped up suddenly from nowhere special, and headed, upon their trail, straight for the old willow, bobbing and hopping along all around, fat and funny, over the white.

Then the face of the river gave two or three great spasm-like heaves, the roaring of the oncoming water became an intolerable thunder, shutting up all other sounds, and the mighty wall of water was upon them.

What followed immediately after that Microtus was not quite sure about. He was aware of the blow, jarring and trembling throughout the wood, as the flood struck the bank and the tree; he was aware of a fog of fine spray, of an awful pandemonium of roaring, hissing, swirling, gurgling, rushing waters; of a dizzy swaying—here he clutched the wood with all his claws desperately—as if the tree were the mast of a ship in a heavy gale; of a rumbling chaos as the bank—undermined by water vole tunnels, I must fear—caved in in great crumbling masses to the strain; and of a sickening sensation of horror as the tree heaved, swung and fell!

Next instant Microtus was jerked from his hold as one jerks an earwig in a tumbler, and flung, kicking, scratching, and nearly out of his senses with terror, into the hollow of the tree, there to be mixed up indiscriminately with his companion and the other, with chips of wood, and swirling water—all tumbling about together.

He picked himself up with that blind fury of desperation which seizes all, or most, of the wild folk upon such occasions, and scrambled miraculously—goodness knows how he did it in that confusion—up the wood and through a hole, out into the open air, to find himself, amazed and appalled, clinging and soaked, upon the trunk of a tree, which was prone and clawing itself, as a lobster walks, by the roots across a welter of tumbling, confused waters which had been a portion of the field, but now resembled a lake, in the wake of the great hurrying wave.

Then the old willow took the water with a resounding plunge, which nearly shot Microtus from his hold, and forced him to run round, as a mouse runs round a revolving cage. Followed a cloud of blinding spray, and Microtus was seated high if not dry, upon the trunk of the old tree, which was speeding downstream upon a waste of waters and at a great rate.

Microtus clung on. His fate was better than the rest of his water vole acquaintances along the river, for they had simply been washed and wiped away. Only Microtus seemed to be left upon the face of what had been river and snow covered meadows and was now a sea. Only Microtus—but no, he felt suddenly that he was not alone, and he looked along the trunk and saw in the fading dusk, and was still, very still.

He was not alone, not by any means alone. There were others who bore him company upon that voyage, for aught he knew, to the sea—or the next world.

There was a squat, round blob in the middle of the tree, and that was the lady in the case. There was another, a dimmer blot farther along, and that was "the other fellow". There was a gnome, grinning and gibbering up among the roots, and that was a holigan brown rat; there was a "speckled band", scarcely moving, hung rope-wise upon a bough, and that was an adder, washed out of his winter sleep; there was a chattering, intolerant "unsquashable" form, as it were, at the bows, and that was a female weasel; and there was one overside, who heaved and blew like a porpoise, with all four legs in the air, and that was a drowning cow.

Altogether they were quite an unhappy family. Then night came and added itself to the general horror of the situation, and Microtus waited for his death. He expected nothing less—in that place and company.

After that there was no such thing as time any more; only events—in the dark.

First of all, at some period or other, the cow overside, who had been quiet for some while, left them. They could tell that by her gradually fading out scent.

Next, the adder, who must have been slowly freezing all along, fell, with a plop they could all hear.

The scent of the female water vole, however, drew alongside, and he looked and saw that she, or a black blot that represented her, was there, close to him.

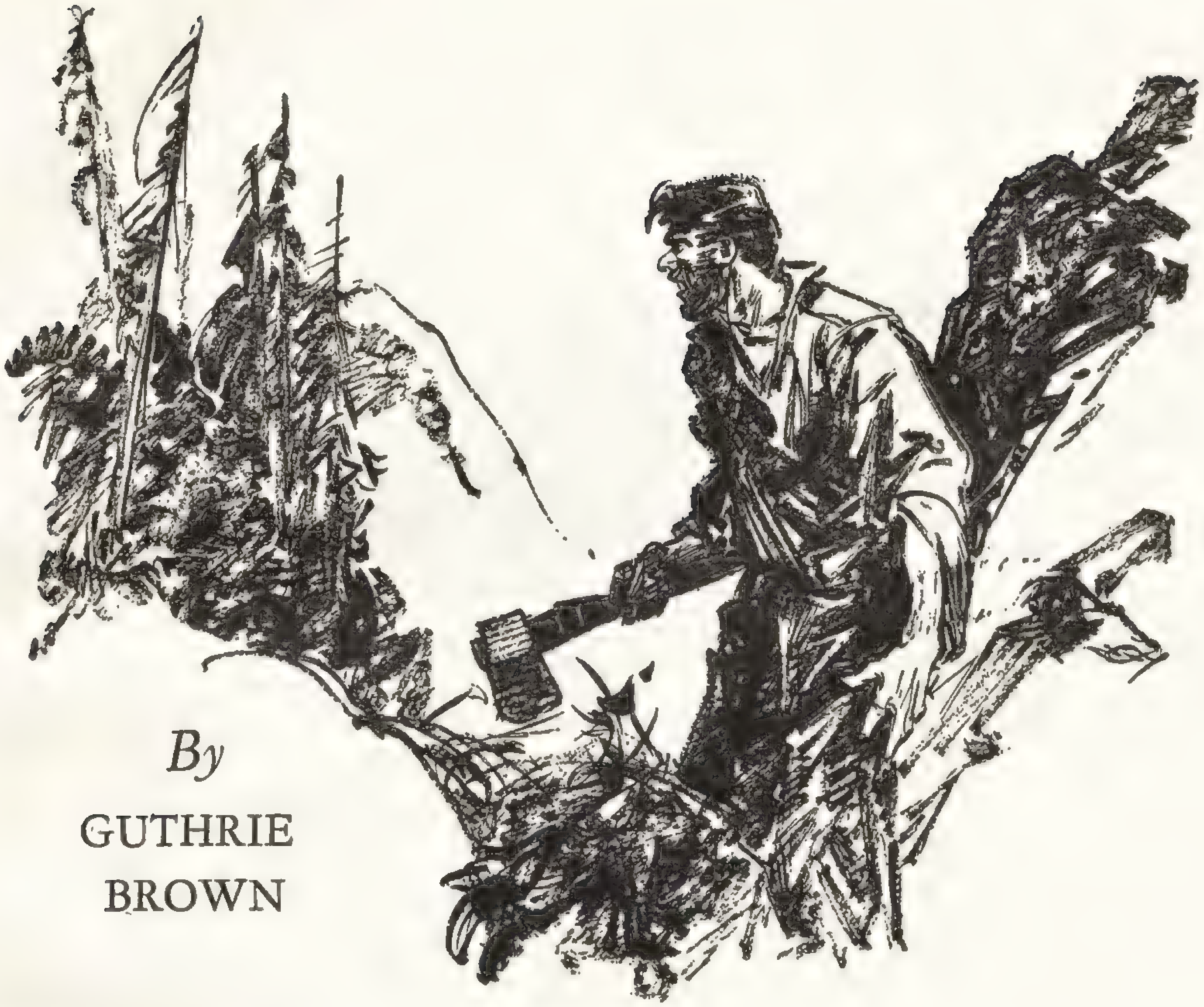
After a certain space Microtus became aware that the scent of the weasel was near. Then he saw her—a long, low something—pass within a few inches, and he ought to have thanked heaven that she was on the windward side of him. The weasel probably objected to the water lapping about her feet—which did not worry the water voles—and was looking for a dryer perch up along the roots, at the other end. And, to judge by the remarks of the rat, a few minutes later, and the stench, which indicated that the weasel was annoyed and nervous and had what gamekeepers call "made the stink," she had found it.

After that and a long interval, Microtus felt—he could hardly have seen but the scraping of claws is much magnified on wood—that something alive was at the back of him. Microtus felt himself cornered, and Microtus pivoted and struck like lightning at a body that he dimly saw. The two grappled, and the action threw the pair of them into the water, where for a few seconds, to judge by the sounds, the battle continued hectically.

Microtus put the foe under twice and, presuming by stabs as of red hot needles in various parts of him, took as much as he gave. Then they parted, because the tree was vanishing in the dark, and that was the worst battle of all, for the current was very strong. Microtus managed it with the last ounce of strength left in him, and lay along the trunk, dead beat. The other scrambled halfway up the trunk three times, but each time fell back, and after the third time the night and the water swallowed him, and he was no more seen. And that combatant was the other, the rival water vole.

Microtus took note of little after that till the willow struck another, and standing, tree, with a resounding jar. The willow turned over and swung round, Microtus and the flapper of that ilk scrambling nimbly round as the old willow revolved. Apparently, however, the weasel and the rat did not; they could not, being perched up among the roots. To judge from sounds alone, they must have fallen out, as well as into the water. Perhaps each tried to climb upon the other. I don't know. Nor does Microtus. They went, anyway, and the sounds of their going into the night—and the blacker night of death—were not nice to listen to. And the two water voles were alone.

Dawn discovered a forlorn willow, stranded among débris and receding shallows in a forlorn land, and upon the trunk of the willow two little fat, hunched water voles, male and female, all alone in a land swept clean of every living thing except the birds. And there, if you please, we will leave them to their own affairs.



By
GUTHRIE
BROWN

A Story of the Road Builders

The BRIDGE

THROUGH the hot glare of a July morning a man walked south along the new concrete of Road No. 30, which is part of the Interstate highway that skirts the westward bulge of the Medina Hills. He was a broad framed man, clothed in overalls and faded shirt, and a Stetson that had seen more prosperous days. His clear brown eyes were taking in every detail of the road as he went along, and occasionally he paused for a closer inspection of the pavement. John Bonner made a practise of periodically reviewing his finished work, afoot and at leisure. It was but one of the practises which had put him where he topped the list of State highway builders.

The young truck driver, who caught up with this big and apparently aimless workman, stopped his machine to ask—

"Goin' my way?"

"How much farther is that new road camp up the line here?" John inquired.

The truck driver looked at him a minute, and his eyes began to twinkle.

"Buddy," he said, "you can't get no job at that camp, 'thout you have a little number like this." He pulled back his jacket to display a five figured numeral on his shirt.

John grinned in response and climbed to the seat.

"Possibly I can qualify," he said.

The driver glanced at him doubtfully as they started on.

"The chief," he advised, "don't encourage outsiders much."

"Thorwald is his name, isn't it?"

"Yeah." The young man seemed uneasy and repeated stubbornly, "He won't like my bringin' in a stranger. I thought you was headed for the Gotthelf ranch and I'd just give you a lift to the forks."

"I'll walk in, if you'd rather," John told him.

"No-o, but things are all sort of torn up, yet, you see, and the chief's got his hands full—"

The voice trailed off and John looked at the speaker. Something seemed to lie behind the last words.

"You won't get in trouble on account of me," he assured him.

"Well, it's your funeral," answered the driver; and thought, "Let Thorwald deal with him. He'll send him packing soon enough."

At the end of the trip John helped unload a dozen barrels of gasoline and stow various supplies in the storeroom, the only building so far completed in the new camp. Then he inquired where he might find the boss, and walked away. The truck driver scratched his head as he looked after him.

"He sure don't seem worried about gettin' what he wants. My idea of heaven would be truckin' with him for swamper."

An hour later this young man, under a shed with his dismembered engine spread about him, looked up at the sound of voices. His boss, Thorwald, and the big man were approaching, and the latter was saying—

"I have a tractor that can handle the maintainer, and I'll send over my grader if you want it."

"No," replied Thorwald. "Don't bother. We won't need that machinery for a week yet."

"Holy mackeral!" murmured the truck driver to himself. "That swamper o' mine is the big high mogul of Road No. 30! And I—and he—and I told him— Well, if he don't beat hell!"

"Merritt," said Thorwald, "how long is it going to take you to get that engine in shape?"

"Think I can have it done by night, Mr. Thorwald. Though—" Merritt added with a frown— "I'm darned if I know yet what's wrong with the thing."

John Bonner squatted on his heel beside the more or less amateur mechanic and laid familiar hands upon the magneto. Twenty minutes later he rose and wiped his hands with a wad of cotton waste, while Merritt said gratefully:

"You've sure saved me a lot o' grief. I can have this thing together by two o'clock, Mr. Thorwald."

Thorwald nodded.

"As soon as you have her running, hook on to the maintainer and take it down to Kelly's Crossing, to Mr. Bonner's camp. He'll give you some pipe to bring back. He could ride down with you, if he cares to wait."

John hesitated. He wanted to get back to work, but it was a long walk and he would save little time. He decided to wait, and moved off with Thorwald. Merritt looked after them speculatively.

"By damn," he murmured. "I never thought there was any man in this world could hold a candle to the chief. But that guy— Common as an old shoe, but if he was to give an order; my eye!"

John, familiar with the joys of settling a new camp, watched Thorwald's efficient management with appreciation.

"I've heard of you," he said, "and I've always wanted to see your work. You're doing a big thing."

Thorwald, nearly as large a man as John and with a face like a Viking, repudiated the compliment.

"No credit to a man for doing what he likes best."

John retorted—

"Plenty of credit if he does the thing well and sticks to it, when he enjoys an income that would let him out of all this." He glanced over the busy scene and added, "The politicians found that you still had a shot or two in your locker, after they'd pitched you out on your ear."

There was a hint of ice in Thorwald's wide smile.

"The trouble now is that I get just the cream of the boys. Only men with five years' clean record are allowed to go out with the road gang in this State. Nearly all of these fellows are back on their feet. It's the poor devils who're new to the mill that need bracing—and they are the ones I can't get at any more."

John nodded understanding, watching the furrowed brow above the blazing blue eyes. He meditated upon the abysmal folly which had let political trickery stop the work of one of the country's greatest penitentiary wardens. But Thorwald had not been licked. He had put in an intensive year learning highway construction, then gone in and outbid every competitor for convict labor. His enemies did not like it, but so far they had devised no scheme for preventing it.

"They tell me," John went on, "that you never have a gun in camp and that you haven't lost a man in the four years you've taken them out."

"Huh!" grunted Thorwald. "What could you expect, when I get only the best of them?"

John smiled.

"Have it your own way. You spoke about my looking over that pipe line."

"Yes. It seems to me that we might make a permanent State camp of this, and if we do the pipe should be put underground to prevent freezing. But that looks to me practically impossible."

"How so?"

"If you think you can make the grade up to the spring, I'll show you."

Turning to follow, John caught a look that flashed between two men who had been setting up bunks under Thorwald's direction. One of these moved as if to follow his boss, but the other caught him and whispered something. Then both watched Thorwald as he walked away. The plain anxiety in their faces reminded John of the note of worry in Merritt's voice when the young man had objected to strangers in camp. But Thorwald himself did not appear worried.

THE Medina Hills are the scarred and pitted back-land of the East Zamora Desert. More than one gold seeker of the '80's left his bones in the great sandstone waste. In '92 a prospector discovered a small pocket of low grade ore and a stampede followed. Today only an occasional tunnel or shaft or dim trail testifies to the life that swarmed for a short time over the land; and the tourist who skims along the paved road where ran an old burro track recognizes not even these.

Between Kelly's Crossing, where John's camp was located, and Thorwald's, lay the south end of Road No. 30 and the north extremity of Road No. 32. John had been at work for four months and was nearly ready to move north. Thorwald was just starting on his section of the highway, having brought his men from another part of the State. He had established himself against a rough, sloping bluff that ran for four or five miles along the edge of the desert. In a hollow, halfway up the slope above camp, was a deep spring. Such springs appear occasionally in the desolate country, drawing their even flow of water from the mountains thirty miles or more away.

"Whew!"

John stopped in astonishment. The steep trail he had been climbing ended abruptly. He stood on a ridge, looking down into a rough walled crevice a hundred feet deep and some fifteen feet wide.

Thorwald, pausing on the foot bridge across the pit, laughed.

"Gives a man a jolt, doesn't it? The face of the bluff must've jarred loose ages ago, by the look of it."

The split-off section was possibly two hundred yards long, its shelving top covered with loose stones and varying in width from ten feet to two.

Thorwald crossed the bridge to the spring, and John followed. Three men were at work in the cramped space, widening and lining the natural well.

John became conscious of a queer tension. A man who had been stooped above the spring, working with extended arm in the water, had straightened and turned. Mechanically John noted the number on the convict's shirt—15098. He was a thin faced, tall man, with sloping shoulders and hard eyes. Between him and Thorwald something seemed to leap like a high voltage spark. The air had become electric with hate.

Thorwald asked in a natural tone—

"Are you going to have enough boulders to finish it, Kline?"

The man crouched at the edge of the spring nodded, and the other workmen looked uneasily from him to their boss. Thorwald stepped across to them, discussing the work, and the stony eyes of 15098 turned upon John with unblinking, impersonal loathing. After a moment the gaze lowered, then lifted again with a half startled expression.

John had a habit of immobility when an issue was in doubt. One of his foremen had once remarked of him that he could hold his tongue in seven different languages, and another retorted that that wasn't half of it—John Bonner could stand still in four dimensions.

Arrested by that abrupt warning of danger, he was studying the flinty face of the convict. By what roads did a man come to so black a hatred of his fellows? Such passion argued capacity for pain. John was thinking, "Cohorts of the Damned," and had an irrational impulse to put out his hand.

Unconsciously, hate sank in the eyes of 15098. He rose, like a man pulled to his feet, puzzled but compelled. And at that instant Thorwald turned. The spell was broken.

The two contractors discussed the proposed pipe line at some length, then descended the trail, followed by the stare of the tall convict, more darkly malevolent than before. It was none of John's business, of course, but if he knew anything of men Thorwald stood in danger of his life. This, no doubt, was what was troubling Merritt and the others.

After the noon meal the two sat for a little in the shade of a tent wall, and the ex-warden filled and lighted a pipe.

"You're thinking of Kline," he said.

John assented and waited for the story.

"He came to us," began Thorwald, "ten years ago, a lifer. He had already served terms in three penitentiaries and had put out two men. That we could be certain about. I'm bound to admit that both were crying for what they got. It was his first sentence that warped him. He had been a cowboy and got into rough company. There were extenuating circumstances about that first case, but the judge didn't see fit to consider them so. Kline was pardoned four years later, but the mischief was done."

Thorwald paused, and John said—

"He hates all men who are free."

"That's it. And worse is his vicious contempt. He believes implicitly that every man is a coward. He makes only one distinction—you are either a cowardly crook or a cowardly fool. He puts me in the second class and himself in the first. He's implacable—" Thorwald leaned forward, jaw hard—"my one complete failure."

John reached out a hand and touched the other's shoulder lightly.

"We're all limited."

"Granted, but—" Thorwald left the sentence in the air.

"You think he'll make a try for freedom?"

"I know it," replied Thorwald. "And that's not all of it. Seven or eight weak sisters have been slipped in on me this time, and Kline is working among them already."

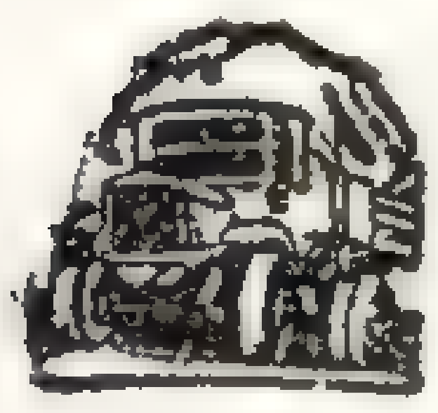
All at once John comprehended.

"I see. Your friends the politicians are busy again. They figure on there being such a break here that you can never win another contract for this labor."

"Pretty, isn't it?" asked Thorwald. Presently he went on, "Kline has waited with the patience of a savage for this chance. I know him, and it would take all he has to keep a clear record for five years. And I couldn't refuse to take him. I don't want my boys thinking I'm afraid. I'm not afraid. But—"

"Tension," suggested John.

"That's it. We can't get down to real work till this thing comes to a head. I only hope he'll make it soon, so I can ship him back."



WHEN Merritt finally had his truck ready, the maintainer had to be maneuvered clear of an assortment of machinery stacked together under the partially finished tool shed. It was rolled halfway out by hand, then a chain from the truck hooked on. Merritt started up too quickly and bumped a wall post.

John saw a pencil of shadow tremble across a sweaty shirt. His glance flashed aloft, and he almost knocked down two men getting under that shadow. A sixteen foot four-by-four, jarred from its position on top of the post, descended with a crash. The man in the shirt flattened himself over an upturned slip, and John eased the timber aside, not a foot above his back.

Merritt tumbled out of his cab and came back with a white face. The other men stood as if petrified for a moment.

"My God!" exclaimed one of them. "How did you do that?"

John smiled at him.

"Just a trick," he answered, and showed them. "You can check the momentum of even a big weight by deflecting its course a couple of times."

"Nevertheless," remarked Thorwald quietly, "it takes a powerful arm—not to mention nerve." And he scowled at the top of the post and said nothing more about it.

Merritt crawled back into his cab.

"He still beats hell," the driver told the steering wheel, and proceeded by half inches until Thorwald yelled—

"For the love o' mud, get a move on you!"

No one noticed a man slip between the tents, a tall man with a strangely baffled expression.

During the drive down to Kelly's Crossing, Merritt opened up—

"That timber had no business bein' loose up there."

John answered—

"Somebody forgot to spike it."

Merritt slanted him a glance.

"You ain't that dumb."

John looked at him, then smiled slowly. Merritt grinned and at once became sober.

"We're pretty sick about this, you know. These road jaunts with the chief has been a piece of heaven for us boys. And that dirty hound of a Kline is goin' to spoil it all—him and them soft spines they sent along to help."

"Your chief seems pretty capable," John commented.

"You bet he is. But what's he to do against things like that? Kline was workin' on the shed after dinner. I saw him come down just 'fore we got there. He hates the chief just 'cause he's white and has always give the bum more 'n an even break."

"He couldn't be sure of getting Thorwald with that timber."

"No, but he'd 'a' got somebody if it hadn't been for you. And then the papers 'd get hold of it, and them political jakes 'd all yell their heads off about men bein' killed by Thorwald's criminal carelessness!" Merritt spat into the middle of the road. "They hate him 'cause he don't kowtow to 'em, and they hate him worse 'cause he treats us like we was men instead o' lice. So do you," Merritt added. "One o' them boys workin' at the spring this mornin' told me how you brought Kline up standin'. I've seen Thorwald do it with others, but not that bird. If—"

He stopped, started to speak again, and thought better of it. The truth was that the outspoken Merritt had said to Thorwald that Bonner was the man who could make Kline toe the mark; and Thorwald had replied with some acidity—

"I guess we can handle Kline."

Merritt had turned away in confusion. He had not meant the remark as a reflection. Probably Thorwald would not have taken it that way if he had not been more bothered than he was admitting.

An hour before dawn John was roused by the bellowing of his name in the foghorn voice of one of his foremen.

"John, for the love o' God, wake up! All hell's busted loose on 32! D'you hear?"

"Coming, Bert." John thought fast as he flung on his garments. Would Thorwald want guns? There were probably three or four in camp. He called, "Who brought the word?"

"Feller on a horse. He's the man—"

"Send him in."

It did not occur to John in the rush of the moment to wonder why the messenger had used a horse instead of a machine.

It was Merritt who pushed aside the tent flap. He made his tale brief. At bedtime last evening a stone had rolled off the bluff and struck Thorwald.

"Busted his hip, I'm dead sure, 'cause he's sufferin' hell's own. But d'you think he'd let anybody come to your camp to telephone for a doctor? Not him. Said every man would be needed by mornin'. I don't know how he knew, but about two o'clock here it come. Kline and six others makes a bust for our best truck. But the chief has things planned so careful and we shoves them birds so close that we got 'em shut up in the storeroom. Then we remembers that every damn' ax in camp is in that shack. Thorwald wouldn't 'a' forgot that if he hadn't been crazy with pain. We got a lock on the door, but even the walls won't stop 'em if they start comin' out with the axes. The chief makes us set up a cot for him close by; and he's bound we're gonna take 'em 'thout killin' nobody."

John nodded and said:

"Then he doesn't want guns. How about men?"

For an instant Merritt hesitated, then said quickly:

"No! Nobody but you."

"Have you put in the call for the doctor?"

"You bet," replied Merritt.

The nearest doctor was fifty miles away.

AS THORWALD was in full command of the situation and of his white and sweating self. Leaning on an elbow in the darkness, he watched the windowless storeroom and directed the search for a cache of grub which he was convinced must be somewhere near. After the seven had been forced into their retreat, he had ordered all machines, horses and food moved to new places and put under heavy guard. Without one of the three the desert would make short work of any escape. This maneuver practically compelled the rebels to delay further action until there was light enough for them to see. Only afterward was it learned that they did not discover the axes till full day came. All but Kline had given up hope of escape, but that sight gave them new determination.

The weak point in the situation was the ex-warden's resolve to effect the capture without any casualties. If that could be accomplished the news of the break would not get outside the camp.

As day approached, a distant sound caught Thorwald's ear. He turned his head sharply and sat up for a moment in spite of his pain. What the hell? It was an engine! He dropped back with a groan and a curse. Just his infernal luck to have some one come butting into this mess! Maybe it would turn off at the forks. No, here it came. And the fellow was driving like a demon possessed.

The car slid to a stop in a smother of dust. Thorwald propped himself up and stared in furious surprise as John strode out of the gloom toward him.

"What in Hades," he demanded, "are you doing here?"

Suddenly still, John stood looking down at him.

"Who the devil asked your interference?" went on Thorwald. He flung his head about, gasping with the wrench of pain. "Damn! Which one of you men pulled this bonehead trick?"

An appalled silence answered him and the tortured voice rose again.

"I told you you couldn't— Which one of you, I'm asking!"

Merritt, still dizzy from his two mad rides, stumbled into range.

"I done it, Mr. Thorwald. I know you told us we couldn't, but—but, by cripes, you *had* to have a doctor, and—"

"And you've spread this story over the whole damn' country!" Thorwald's voice broke with fury, and he shifted his gaze to John. "I'll thank you to take your men and your guns and get out!"

"I didn't bring either," was the level answer. "And my men, also, are loyal, Mr. Thorwald. No word of this will ever pass my camp."

John turned and walked back to his machine, anger and understanding fighting in him for the upper hold. Thorwald's wet face told its story in the spreading dawn, but did even that excuse—?

"Mr. Bonner—" it was Merritt's troubled voice. "Mr. Bonner, I'm sure sorry you got treated that way, but I ain't sorry I done it. I had to sneak that horse out and do it, if he eats me up for it." John made a motion of assent. "Besides, we need you, even if he don't know it. How can he think straight, the way he is?"

"I know, Merritt."

"I'll tell you somethin' else." The man lowered his tone. "A buddy o' mine says that rock never fell off the ridge. He says it was pushed off and he's bettin' Thorwald knows it. The chief makes that round every night at nine-thirty and—Kline wasn't in his cot."

This was a new angle to the affair and John considered it soberly. Seven men with axes could offer formidable opposition to several times their number not so well armed. And if Kline had tried to kill Thorwald he would stop at nothing now.

Merritt watched him, dumbly appealing. John sat down on the running board of his car.

Thorwald's entire attention was upon the storeroom. Once in awhile his head dropped forward while he fought with his tormented body. John found himself sweating in sympathy with the man's agony and hoping that something would happen soon. As full day came every one felt the same tension, stretched between the prospect of a vicious battle and the sight of Thorwald's suffering.

There was no sound from the storeroom. Nerves drew to the snapping point. Minute after interminable minute dragged by, while the sun and the morning wind got up together. Little swirls of dust rose and danced through the camp, and men coughed and cursed in the growing heat. Thorwald shook the sweat from his face and wondered dully how much a man could endure before his senses left him. And John for the first time in his life was wondering how long he would be able to sit quiet.

Then, all at once, the axes fell as if from a single hand. Crash on crash, gaps in the door, flying splinters, the groan of nails dragged from new pine, a bellow of fury as a blow sideslipped. A dozen hideous seconds while the men outside waited with pounding hearts. They must not kill, they must not injure seriously—and they must capture.

Now the door was down. The rebels were in the open. Kline plunged straight at the helpless Thorwald, knocking men right and left. Merritt flung himself between, not a second too soon, and fell under the ax.

Then a wild cry of warning broke from fifty throats. Instead of attacking the guarded trucks or horses, the convicts were making for the bluff. Three were caught and borne down in spite of the flashing axes, one stumbled over a boulder and was promptly seized by a couple of nimble guards, but two got away and were climbing the trail to the spring.

The guard around Thorwald, armed with hammers and short lengths of steel, was too strong for Kline to break through. With a snarl of defeated rage he too turned toward the bluff, his ax a shining circle about him.

John had picked up Merritt and laid

him on a bunk in a nearby tent. The man had been half scalped, but he was breathing. It did not look like a death blow. A clean towel knotted swiftly, collar opened, a dash of water—and then new, excited exclamations brought John outside.

To every one the flight toward the bluff had seemed a piece of insanity. There was no way out of the hollow in the rocks that held the spring. But to desperate men a desperate measure had looked easy.

To the left of the hollow, angling upward along the crumbling face of the slope, was the dim remnant of a trail. It was so slight as to offer scant foothold for a goat. Never once had it appealed to Thorwald as a possible avenue of escape. But the two had started up it as Kline followed on the lower trail.

Could they make it? If they got out into the broken country of the Medina Hills, capture would be difficult.

John alone foresaw certain catastrophe. One glance at that trail yesterday had told him how it had been made thirty years ago. If it had been merely dirt, as it looked, the fugitives might have got away. But part of it had been a narrow bridge of boards, propped against the rock with posts which had rotted long ago. His roar of warning startled them all, but the two only hurried the faster.

Then—the ground under them dissolved, and they shot from sight with a terrified cry, while the watchers stood rooted in the fascination of horror.

John leaped forward one stride and stopped, shaking. He had been told to keep out . . . In that moment of dead silence Thorwald's voice came clearly.

"Bonner."

John turned his head. Apology, confession, appeal—Thorwald's look said it all. John's eyes gleamed in understanding, and the next instant, so it seemed to the spectators, he was climbing the bluff.

He gained the top of the ridge and stepped quickly out on the foot bridge. His glance flashed toward the bottom of the crevice, caught an unbelievable sight. Twenty feet down were the men who had just plunged to their death. They had struck and clung to a ledge in the wall and one man was moaning with a broken leg.

Something warned John. He looked up, to see Kline crouched opposite him. The convict had worked loose the anchors with which Thorwald had guarded the bridge, and two muscular hands were on the point of tipping it into the abyss.

Realizing the folly of trying to run either forward or back, John stood quiet in the middle of the bridge, looking steadily at Kline.

The convict paused, his face working. This man again! How could any one stand so still? And he was not scared! The fact stunned Kline. Not afraid. But he must be. All men were afraid. He'd be—he'd be in another second!

The fingers of 15098 clutched and released the edge of the bridge spasmodically as he watched John with incredulous eyes. But he must act! If he did not, he was once more a captive, a doomed man, a hopeless, helpless creature at the mercy of others. He was whipping himself to performance. He must act! Then seize the rope he had hidden near the spring, loop it over a crag above, be away before they could possibly get him. He had not trusted that trail too much himself, if the dash for the truck failed. Five black years Kline had curbed and humbled himself for his chance. Was he to be robbed of it by this big, still man?

All this, through breathless seconds, while the desert and the very morning seemed to wait.

Kline's body jerked forward. He was trembling, half nauseated by the passion of his desire. Freedom! A man once more! Not a number! The lean hands tightened on the boards—lifted. Curse him! Why didn't he move? . . . One more lift . . . now . . . now! . . . What was the matter with his hands?

15098 dropped his hold with a sob.

The story of the sequel floated about jail corridors for many a year, but beyond that it was never known—how two men, under the hot beat of the desert sun and with bare footing on the dizzy slope, had cast down ropes and one by one hauled out the prisoners; how a man on a cot had watched them with something in his eyes of which he was not ashamed; how big John Bonner, wiping his streaming brow at the last, had grinned and dropped a hand on the shoulder of his companion; and how 15098 had grinned back, nearly cracking his face with the unaccustomed effort.

Also it was related, with unholy and ribald glee, how, half an hour later, a dust powdered doctor was indulging in profane comment upon the low mental average of a camp where men could not dodge falling rocks or the heels of vicious horses or keep from slipping off steep trails and getting their heads laid open.

It was not every day in the week that numbered men were able to concoct a whopper which thwarted politicians had to swallow.

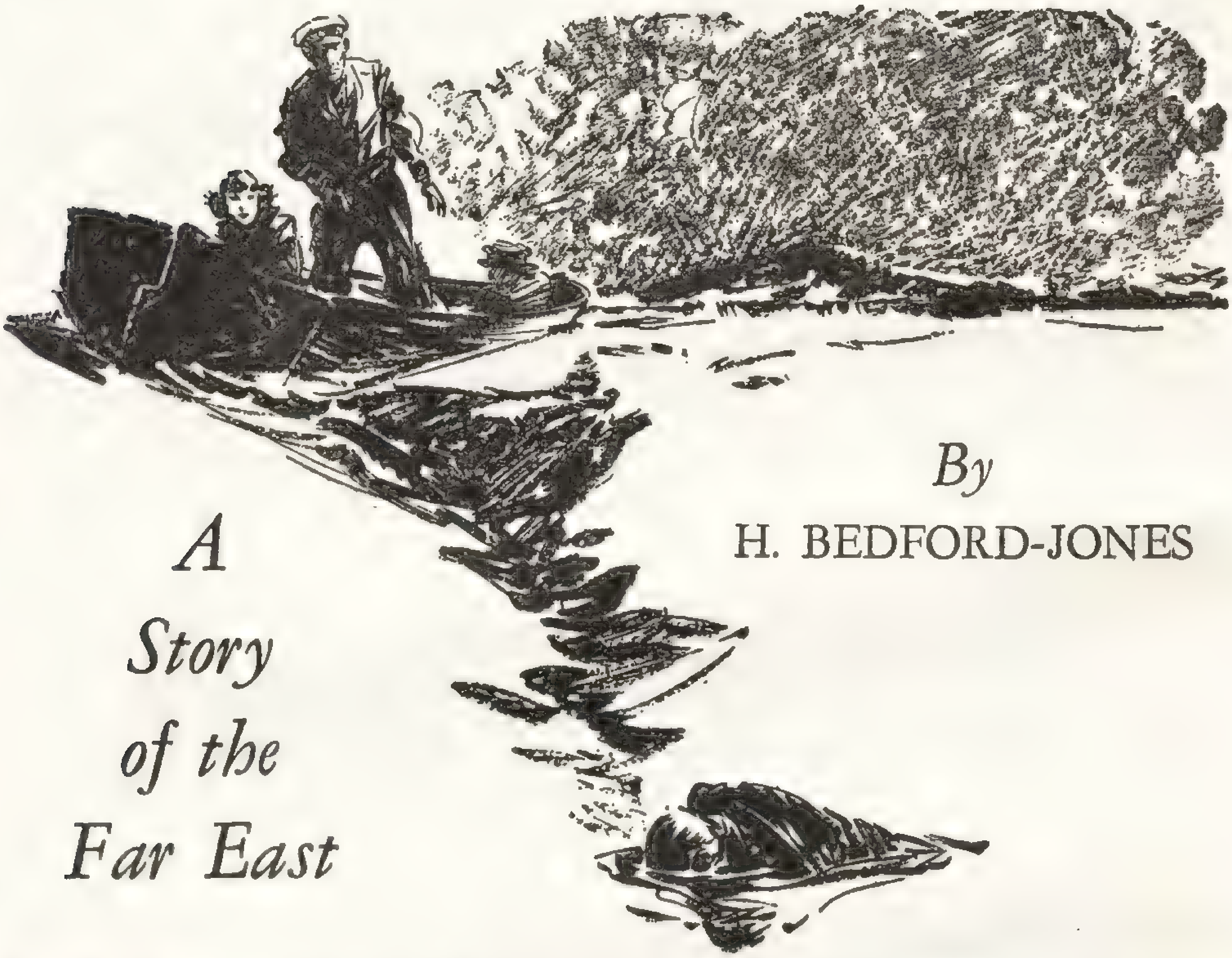
HEADIN' SOUTH

By COURTNEY McCURDY

FOUR 'boes squatting round a pine-knot fire
In a red clay gully by the railroad track,
Thrilling to the thunder of the Dixie Flyer
As she highballs by like a comet through the black:
Four bums yarning—and every one a liar!—
Jake robbed a mail-train, Bob bumped a shack,
Slick stole the Kohinoor but couldn't find a buyer,
Ace won a hundred grand and lost it all back!

Slumgullion stew served round hot as lava,
Another tall yarn and it's time for the bed;
A black-brewed nightcap of tin-can Java,
Pinestraw for a mattress and the sky for a spread:
Dreams sweet as honey of days forever sunny . . .
Then a mocking-bird's *Ave*, and a dawn flame-red.

COASTWISE MURDER



A Story of the Far East

By
H. BEDFORD-JONES

GROWING daylight slowly disclosed the occupants of the boat to one another, as though to mitigate the unpleasant surprise of the situation by giving every one a chance for adjustment. All the surprise, however, was on the part of Carson. He had expected to wake up in heaven or hell; not in an open boat.

His last memory was of getting a nasty crack on the head and pitching off the bridge into the black waters. He had just taken over the bridge from the second officer—who was, as usual when leaving Hongkong, drunk—when the old *Feng Shan* ripped out her bottom and went down in no time. There had been an ungodly squabble on the upper deck; officers and Sikh guards shooting, Chinese rushing the boats, lights out and the devil to pay. Carson, the mate, had been trying to get his own boat lowered when they jumped him.

"First time I ever heard of a senseless man swimming and hauling himself into a boat!" he muttered. "But nobody else hauled me aboard, that's sure."

True enough. The sea was empty, showing neither boats nor wreckage; since the *Feng Shan* had gone down about midnight, there was no telling whether this one boat had drifted. The mountains of the China coast showed vaguely against the western sky, so things were not half bad. Satisfied, Carson shifted his attention to the occupants of the boat.

These numbered four. Carson lay slumped up in the bow. Lying on a forward thwart facing him was a Chinese gentleman, eyes wide open, blood coagulated beneath his arm—quite dead. A knife thrust under the shoulder blade, as Carson later discovered, had done the business; probably during the mêlée on deck. Only, the gentleman's embroidered silk garments were much disarranged, as though he had been well rifled. Curious, that.

On the next thwart aft sat a woman—a Chinese woman—looking straight at Carson as he drew himself up on stiffened knees. He remembered having seen her aboard when they left Hongkong; first class, too, therefore probably a Hongkong lady and a British subject. Her garments were of finest silk, heavily embroidered. Her face was like old and beautiful ivory, but she was by no means old; her black hair was brushed back from her forehead and fastened in balls on either side of her head with jeweled pins. Except for the lack of the usual paint on her face, she might have been sitting quietly at home. On her right arm was a bracelet of brown Han jade, which compared favorably in value with fine diamonds. Her earrings were of large pink pearls, and her necklace of graduated pearls was probably real.

Carson blinked at her, found no expression, no life, in her face, except for its delicate flush; an exquisite face in its way, like a flower. He looked past her. In the stern was a huddled figure, snoring, sound asleep—a man, probably a passenger, by his clothes.

"Huh," said Carson, feeling his head and discovering nothing worse than a bump. "If you don't object, I'll get rid of this."

He touched the body before him. The Chinese lady said nothing, made no sign. With an effort Carson heaved up the body and slid it across the gunwale. He noticed that it was not set in *rigor mortis*, except at the extremities, and wondered, somewhat; the man could not have been dead very long.

With the heave, with the slight rippling splash, the boat rocked. The man in the stern sat up, rubbing his eyes. Then Carson recollected him—he had met the chap at dinner. Some sort of business man going to Kwangchow.

"Hello, King," he said. "Feeling fit?"

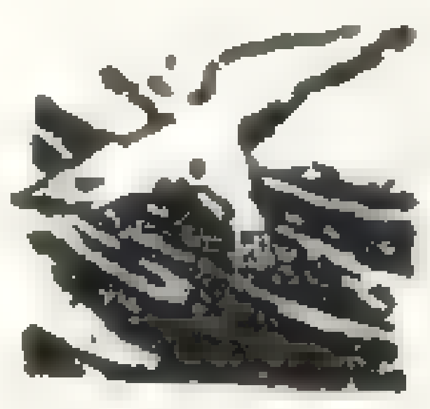
"Uh-huh." King stared at him and the lady in surprise, then looked around. King was well dressed. His jaw was heavy, his face angular and powerful, his eyes resolute. He shoved black hair back from his sloping forehead and his eyes came to rest on Carson. "You're the mate, eh? Where's every one else?"

Carson merely gestured for answer. He was looking now at the Chinese lady, whose eyes were following the bobbing corpse with an odd expression. Along the hem of her gaily broidered coat skirt he noticed a red smear—it could by no means have got there had she been sitting on the thwart all the while. Was it possible, then, that—

"Oh, well, what of it? Not my funeral," said Carson to himself. Then, aloud, "All right, King? Then come along and lend a hand. We'll get the mast stepped. This is one time we can thank the Lord for Board of Trade regulations! Water, grub, mast, sail—all shipshape."

King made his way forward, the lady drawing aside for him; evidently she understood English—probably spoke it perfectly. As indeed she did. When King came closer, Carson comprehended the reason for that snoring slumber, saw it in the bloodshot eyes, sniffed it in the evil breath. King had not even flung the cognac bottle overboard, but had left it in the stern sheets.

Carson shrugged and directed the work.



THE MORNING was clear as a bell, with a light breeze that heeled the boat gently and sent her slipping through the water toward the blue mountains. Carson decided that they must have struck one of the shoals off the Flies, and that the boat had drifted farther out to sea before dawn. The Old Man had warned the second officer about those shoals, too.

Well, things were not so bad, reflected Carson philosophically. Good weather, plenty of grub and water and the coast within sight. Funny about that dead Chinese, though!

He had broken out food and water and tried to be polite to the Chinese lady, but she was like a graven image of old ivory. She would not speak a word, but Carson had an idea that she knew everything that was said. She sat there looking out across the horizon.

It was different with King, who lent a hand with alacrity, then pottered around the impassive lady, talked a bit with Carson and finally went back to sleep on the thwart between them. Carson decided that he was no gentleman; he had lost a good deal of surface veneer since the previous evening, had twice addressed the lady in Mandarin, and behind her back had winked suggestively at Carson in a way the mate did not fancy at all.

And there was something else. A look or two had passed—just a glance, between King and the Chinese lady; but they had set Carson wondering. He knew when there was a hidden meaning in looks.

At noon the breeze fell to nothing, with the coast seven or eight miles away. The Chinese lady had realized that she was being sunburned; she refused food, edged down beneath the thwart and lay with her silken jacket half over her head. Carson slipped out of his own white jacket, long since dried, and passed it to King, who had now wakened.

"Put it over her, poor woman!"

King obeyed; and Carson was certain that he whispered something to her as he spread the jacket over her head and shoulders. Then King came clawing aft again, hungry. He and Carson opened a tin of bully beef and got out the biscuit. Refreshed by his sleep, King was voluble.

"How'd you get off?" asked Carson as he munched.

"Happened to be on the upper deck," said King. "This boat was put over and the crowd rushed me over toward it. To tell the truth, I'd been drinking a bit and I'm not sure just what did happen—it was a hell of a muss. When I came around a bit, I was floating in what looked to be an empty boat and I was cold. Had a bottle of cognac and hit it up. After awhile I went to sleep and didn't wake up again until daylight."

Carson squinted at the distant blue hills. His angular features, his slightly faded blue eyes, gave no hint of his thoughts; as a matter of fact he did not believe a word of King's story. It was not likely—any of it.

"How'd a dead chink get aboard?" asked Carson reflectively.

"Didn't see any!" said King in surprise. "She ain't dead."

"The man." Carson looked at him calmly. "You didn't wake up in time. I put him over."

"First I'd heard of it," and King shook his head. "What man was he?"

"How in hell would I know that?" demanded Carson. "She never said a word. Who is she?"

King glanced over his shoulder at the covered figure.

"Some rich John's wife," he said, low voiced. "High caste. By the way, there'll be some big insurance paid over what happened last night! Some important chaps aboard. One of 'em was Quong, the Macao pearl merchant. I'd met him two or three times; fine man, too."

Carson's eyes lingered on King.

"Macao?"

"Uh-huh. I've done business with him there. Saw him last week—he said he was taking this boat. I had dinner with him, in fact." King was almost boasting now, oddly enough. "I expect he had a fist full o' pearls along. He goes up to Shanghai twice a year to peddle 'em around. Well, he won't go any more!"

Carson nodded and handed over a pannikin of water, taking one for himself.

The wind came up again; half an hour later the brazen sky was half veiled by a wrack of rising clouds that covered the sun. King, who had plenty of cigars and cigarets, shared them with Carson and then went forward and roused up the woman. She had been asleep. When Carson beckoned her aft she obeyed, King helping her.

"Better sit here in front of me," said Carson. "King, stay for'ard there and handle the sheet. An hour of this and we'll make the land—just in time, too. It'll blow a bit tonight."

"Where are we?" King turned, scrutinizing the coast. "Anywhere near shelter?"

Carson shook his head.

"No, but it might be worse. We can land on one of the islands; all islands along here. When the blow's past we can haul up for Macao—ought to make it by tomorrow night, unless we speak a ship first. We sailed on the tide yesterday afternoon and hadn't gone a great ways by midnight—not above fifty knots. We can haul up for the north tonight, unless weather comes. Looks like squalls, but they may pass over by night."

King bit at a cigar and relapsed into silence.

The Chinese lady sat leaning against the weather gunwale of the boat as it heeled, and she must have felt that Carson was scrutinizing her, for she turned and met his eyes.

"Feeling all right?" he asked.

"Yes, thanks," she returned in English. He smiled.

"So you haven't lost your tongue, eh? What's your name?"

"Lady Ming," she said, and Carson read in her eyes that she lied. Carson was nobody's fool.

"That dead man was your husband?"

"No," she said. "I never saw him before."

"Oh, hell," said Carson disgustedly.

He was glad when presently she turned away again; somehow, he felt better with her back toward him. There was some white blood in her, he decided. Certainly she was beautiful in her way; at the same time, he felt uncomfortable with her looking at him. He was no saint, and he had been in many ports. He could imagine what a blazing creature she would be with passion stirring in her and all that statuesque poise departed.

"Hell!" he reflected. "Let them as likes 'em have 'em! King, for instance. Something between the two of them, all right."

The weather wrinkles deepened about his eyes as he squinted ahead, and his thin lips became set in a line. It was none of his business, of course; yet he began to think about that Chinese gentleman with the knife wound in his back, lying dead on the thwart, eyes wide open. Perhaps the knife thrust had been given in the jam aboard the sinking coaster, perhaps the yellow man had quietly bled to death—perhaps not. Hard to say.

"Wish I had the pilot here now—I'd know all about these islands in a minute," muttered Carson.

He was thinking about his job; but the subconscious part of his brain was still thinking about the three others who had been in the boat. And, even before he realized it, even while he watched the first burst of rain sweeping down across the water, the thing was getting all straightened out in his mind. Guesswork, of course.

He forgot he had given Lady Ming the lie direct.

THE DRENCHING downpour had passed them over, soaking them to the skin, happily filling the water breaker, leaving ankle deep water sloshing around in the bottom of the boat. She heeled over a little more as she turned to the tiller, rounding the point of the island, making for the sheltered patch of sandy beach.

King crouched, eyes all for the shore. Lady Ming had not moved; the thin drenched silks clung tightly to her supple body, outlining every curve and contour of its slim length. Carson looked from her to the water and back again to her. When her coat blew back for an instant, he was looking at the bulge by her hip, and had a clear glimpse of it; he knew sharkskin when he saw it. He smiled thinly and bided his time. He had conceived a mounting dislike for Lady Ming.

They were safe enough now; there would be squall after squall, perhaps until sunset, but there was no hurry. Sunset would bring peace, and they could embark again without danger of rain and waves filling the boat. King, oddly enough, had removed his coat when the first burst of rain came and had rolled it up into a tight bundle below the thwart, as though to preserve something from the water. Carson saw that, too, and shrugged. None of his business, of course, yet it was in keeping.

These islands here were all slabs and spikes of rock, some bare and sandy, some overgrown with grass, some merging with the inland hills. This one was small, grassy, uninhabited. The strip of beach gave no shelter from great combers rolling in over the sea, but there were no combers now, with these squalls. The rain kept the waves down, and all the wild trouble lay up above in the sky, not in the water.

So, with no surf to hinder, the boat's nose ran in and touched the sand with a jar, but she was still a few feet out from shore.

"Over, King, and haul her up!" rose Carson's voice. "I'll bring the lady. Here, Lady Ming, take my hand, now—"

She rose obediently, when King had jumped awkwardly over. Carson rose also. Something happened—a boat lurches quickly, beyond any warning. Without a sound or a cry Lady Ming pitched into the water.

Carson was after her instantly, waist deep. She was struggling now; he gripped for her, seemed to have difficulty in locating her. His right hand slid something into his hip pocket, and then he had her in his left arm, holding her up as she choked, lifting her well above the water.

"Sorry," he said, but with a smile in his eyes. "No great harm done. There you are!"

He set her on the sand and turned back to help King with the boat, unshipping the tiller, unstepping the mast, laying aside everything not lashed down. Between them they got the boat up sufficiently and tipped her over.

"Better carry those stores up to the rocks," said King. "We'll have a fire, eh?"

"Good idea," approved Carson. "The smoke will draw native boats, but we'll be gone before they venture out to us."

Lady Ming followed them up to where great rocks jutted from the sand, giving shelter from wind and rain. The two men carried up the stores, load by load; she sat down in the sand and watched them, her face placid as the dawn in which her glowing jewels of eyes were set. Once, and once only, her hand went to her thigh and slipped along the silk, and her eyes widened a little and then fastened upon Carson. She said nothing, however.

King had fetched up his coat, still wrapped in a ball, and set it by a rock aside.

"Got a knife?" asked Carson idly. "I'd better look about and shred up some dry sticks. Not many matches to waste in that waterproof box. Must have a knife, though—any kind."

King hung fire for an instant, then fumbled in his wet pocket.

"Sure, I've got my old faithful here," he said. "There y'are. I'll be getting after some dry wood, too. Better have a drink all around, with this soaking?"

Carson pocketed the large knife and nodded. He went to the stores; the brandy was intact, and he measured out a stiff drink all around. Then he went off up among the jutting rocks, out of sight.

When he was gone, Lady Ming abruptly lost her statesque silence, her calm poise. She came to her feet, color leaping in her cheeks, and caught at the wrist of King.

"He knows!" she said, a species of gasping utterance behind her words. "He knows! He—he took them; he tipped the boat purposely! He took them while I was under water—"

King started, staring at her. His eyes widened in a moment of fright, then his face altered and hardened suddenly; the hot blood ebbed out of his cheeks and his hands clenched into two hard knots.

"No!" he said thickly. "You—you're wrong. He couldn't know; you said when he came aboard he slumped down and was unconscious!"

She nodded.

"I thought so. Perhaps I was wrong. He says I'm a liar, Charley. He knows who I am after all. He's been playing with us—and he took them."

Her ivory face was gray now, her eyes wide and luminous. King shook himself, freed his wrist from her grip.

"All right," he said harshly. "Leave it to me."

He went to the pile of stores and gulped at the brandy. Then he strode over to the ball beside the rock and lifted his coat, shook it out, took something from within the folds and shoved it into the pocket. He put the coat on, smoothed it out carefully and waved his hand to Lady Ming.

"My job," he said. "You've done your part. Be back soon."

He strode away, walking with swift, resolute strides, in the direction which Carson had taken. Another squall was sweeping down, the wind whistling among the rocks that jutted from the sand and merged with the backbone of the island.

THERE was no lack of small stuff among the upper rocks, all sorts of dry stuff in nooks and crannies, but Carson was in no hurry to garner it.

Once well away to himself, he took out the knife King had given him and examined it with a slight grimace, as though the touch of it were keenly distasteful. It was a large, heavy knife of peculiar pattern; Carson had seen this pattern before. The main blade worked on a spring, and shot out suddenly under his pressure; a three-inch shaft of steel, worked to a razor edge on both sides—a knife, perhaps, but also a poniard.

Holding it up, Carson examined it closely and grimaced again. All the blade was clean and shining; but at its base, and in the notch of the haft that had enclosed the blade, was a minute discoloration that flaked away under his finger nail. Carson closed the knife and put it in his pocket.

"Hm!" he said, looking up at the sky. "Hard to wipe a knife clean in the dark, eh? And Chinaman's blood is just the same as mine, I guess. Blood's blood, when it comes to that."

He reached around to his hip pocket.

Now there came into his hand a case, not unlike a cigar case in shape, but longer. It was a rather beautiful thing of sharkskin—not coarse shagreen at all, but worked into fine and lissom shape, yet so stout as to protect whatever lay inside. It was in two parts, so made that one fitted over the other, not too tightly, yet just tight enough. Carson pulled them apart and inspected the one which was the cover.

As he had thought, Chinese characters were brushed on the lining of one side; and on the other, in English, was written, "Quong Li, Macao".

"So!" muttered Carson musingly, and his eyes darkened. "Pretty good guesser, eh? None of my business, of course; just the same, that fool had to blab. Smart! They have to prove how smart they are, eh? Let's see, now—"

He prodded the cotton which filled the inner part of the case, prodded it with his finger, felt harder globules within the cotton. He did not examine to see what they were, however; there was no need. He reflectively telescoped the shagreen case together again and then, after a moment, glanced up. He saw King coming toward him, but the contempt and anger which filled his salt rimmed eyes quite blinded him to the fact that King was now wearing his coat. Otherwise, Carson would have observed it. He made no effort to hide the case, but stood with it in his hand as the other man approached.

"Well?" said King, with assumed geniality. "Finding much?"

"Yes," said Carson. "A good deal."

King stopped short, looking at this thin featured, inflexible man whose eyes burned out at him so contemptuously. Danger here, acute danger; King wet his lips, hesitated.

"Let me tell you something," said Carson, quite without any heat, in a dispassionate way. "None o' my business, of course, but I'd like you to know what a ratty little brute you are, King. I want to tell you what happened last night—I've remembered about that gun going off so damned fast by the No. 3 boat. It goes back beyond that, back to Macao—quite a good friend of Quong, weren't you? Visited in his home, met his No. 1 wife and so forth. Yeah. Took the same boat with him for Kwangchow."

A mortal pallor had stolen into King's features.

"What you talking about?" he growled.

"You," said Carson calmly. "Luck helped you no end last night, didn't it? You got Quong and his wife into that boat—drunk, my eye! You had the liquor, but you were cursed sober. Whatever you had framed up with her, luck played into your hand, eh? You bet. And you got away with the boat, the three of you, drifting there. And Quong went to sleep on the for'ard thwart—and then you bit him like the rats you are. She took him by the neck and held him there and you put the knife into him; right place, too. That's why his eyes stayed open and his hands were so queer. Held him till you pulled it out, and smeared blood on her coat to boot. Then you guzzled the brandy and fell asleep, while she looted him."

"You're crazy!" said King, in a shrill, thin voice. His hands were shaking. "You're stark mad—mad!"

"Not a bit of it," said Carson. "None o' my business, but—"

"You damned sneak!" cried out King. The voice, the cry, seemed to come from him like an explosion. His right hand fumbled in his pocket. "You sneak—"

The automatic pistol leaped out and vomited a jet of flame, even as Carson realized his peril and leaped forward. Again came the crash, and a third staccato report echoed up among the jutting rocks. Carson was jerked around as by an invisible hand and plunged down head first, and lay there.

"You damned fool!" said King, panting, looking down wide eyed at his victim. "None of your business—no, I guess not!"

He dabbed sweat from his eyes, thrust the pistol into his pocket, then stooped and caught up the shagreen case, which had fallen at his feet. Then he turned and hurried away, broke into a run and was gone.

Lady Ming—a much more decorative name than the commonplace Mrs. Quong Li, and related to more aristocratic families—had regained her usual composure and was sitting in the lee of an overhanging mass of rock when King approached. The sky had blackened, and another burst of rain was threatening down the shrieking wind.

She watched him draw near, only the suggestion of an inquiry in her liquid dark eyes. He too had mastered his emotions; he came striding up vigorously, with the resolute air of one who has trampled down all fears and menaces, and there was a gay swagger in his manner as he halted and chucked the shagreen case plump into her lap.

"There you are!" he exclaimed, and laughed. "And now we don't have to be so damned careful any more— What do I get, eh?"

She lifted her face and smiled—the curiously transforming smile which was like a flame breaking through those delicate features of old ivory. King stooped and pressed his lips to hers; but a patter of rain swept down—it was no time for romance.

"Did you—" she hesitated. King laughed again, confidently.

"Sure. We had a talk. He knew, all right. Blessed if I can see how! But he had the whole thing laid out as though he'd seen it. You were right—he was a deep 'un. Well, he's safe now, and so are we. I plumped three bullets into him, took the pearls and everything's jake."

"You are wonderful!" she said, in smilingly drawled accents. King sniggered and got out a cigar and crowded into the shelter beside her.

"I'll light a fire as soon as this rain lets up," he said. "Then we can be comfortable. Look at the sky! It's clearing."

The sky to west and north was, indeed,

turning into a vivid blue; but the squalls would not cease for a long while. Lady Ming looked at her protector and smiled again.

"You are wonderful!" she said for the second time. "The boat—can you manage it?"

"Sure, sure," he said confidently, but his eyes were not confident as they shifted toward the shore. The boat was out of sight; they were in among the jutting masses of rock, and the strip of beach could not be seen from this point. With the downpour of rain, in fact, one could not see fifty feet away.

"No trouble about that," said King. "We ain't fifty mile from Macao. He said so himself. Nothing to do but follow the coast north, see? I'll manage it, all right. You've done your part, little lady, and I'll do mine."

"You are wonderful!" she said again, and her ivory face touched his unshaven cheek.

THE FIGURE of Carson lay motionless among the rocks, the left side of his shirt all crimsoned. The downpouring rain soon washed away the crimson, however, until it was only a faint reddish stain.

Blue sky showed in the west and north, and the cloud wrack slowly scattered and drove out of the sky; another and another squall beat down, but they were only final efforts of the elements. The wind would be puffy, uneven, dangerous, all through the evening; but by morning it would be back to normal monsoon.

Later in the afternoon the sun was blazing forth as though nothing had happened at all. It fell upon the drenched, bloodless figure of Carson and dried it, enveloped it in a mantle of warmth and wakened it into life; for there was still life in the lean body. In fact, Carson was snoring as he lay there, until the warmth brought him out of his slumber.

He stirred, opened his eyes, came to one elbow—and groaned. His face, a bloodless mask, contorted in agony; but he sat up and took stock of himself; he still had King's knife in his pocket, and he got this out and opened it, cutting at his shirt. Presently he was naked to the waist, except for grotesque patches where his shirt was fastened to his body. He left these alone, after exploring them gingerly.

Two bullets had struck him; one had missed. Of the two, one leaden pellet had hit high up, raking a nasty gash across his neck and shoulder, but doing no great damage. The other had struck lower down, tearing through the tissues of his side. He was not certain, but thought one rib at least was broken. Fortunately, the bullet had ripped clear of him, leaving a gash as though made by a butcher's cleaver. Rain had cleansed the wounds and washed away the blood; the later bleeding had coagulated so that the shirt was stuck hard and fast. The wounds were now well stopped by the patches of shirt Carson left in place.

With what remained of the shirt he contrived a bandage about his body to hold the lower and more dangerous wound as it was. The scrape across his shoulder he disdained to bandage. When this was done he came to his feet—and staggered.

Only then did he realize his stiffness, his weakness. Blood had drained out of him. His whole left side was so stiff that any arm movement was torture—yet he could use his arm if necessary. He looked up at the sun, which was close to the western hills.

"Half an hour of daylight, eh?" he reflected. "Question is, do I want to find that ruddy blighter or not? I'm in no shape to jump him, even if he didn't have his gun. However, must do it—the only hope I have is that boat."

He did not waste any breath or energy on curses, but he thought a good deal. A hollow among the rocks held a little pool of rain water. He staggered to it, painfully lowered himself and drank his fill. Then he got to his feet again and headed for the beach.

His progress was slow, for it hurt him even to walk; but he forged doggedly ahead, now and again pausing to lean against a rock. The boat meant escape; its stores and water meant existence. Even without the food and drink, the boat would do—he could last for a day or two on the resources of his body.

Dragging himself along, he came at last to where he had left King and Lady Ming, and the stores. Nothing was here except the still warm ashes of a fire, and footprints that had been made when the sand was wet. Carson compressed his lips and went on, heading now for the beach.

After a time he got glimpses of it between the jutting rock masses. He plodded on until at length it came clearly into his sight. And it was empty. Calm, complete calm had fallen; in the glory of sunset everything, rocks and mountains and water, was bathed in dazzling golden light. Carson leaned back against a rock and squinted at the water.

There was no boat, no sail in sight. Sudden puffs of wind struck across the water in sharply edged catspaws, then were gone again. Carson, recovering from the shock of this emptiness, glanced at the promontory to his right.

"She's probably out there, heading for the north. I could see her if I got across to that sand spit," he muttered. "But what's the use? I don't want to see her. Better make sure, though—they left good tracks—must ha' got off as soon as things cleared up. Currents like mill races all along here, too."

He followed the tracks toward where the boat had been at high tide; the tide was out now.

The sun died out as he came to the tracked up sand at high water mark. Day was almost done. A pair of oars lay on the sand; the others had been lashed beneath the thwarts, probably were still there—King had no knife now. Carson smiled grimly at the thought as he studied the sand and its marks.

They had worked together, King and the Chinese lady, getting the boat over and shoved down to the water—no light job for them, either. He could see their heel marks, proving how they had tugged and shoved. Making up the coast, probably; and Carson's grim, ironic smile came out again at the notion of it. He had discovered during the morning that King knew less than nothing about handling a boat. Much less a boat under sail.

So they had put out together, had they —out where the wind puffs were still flicking down from the hills? Well, King would have a sweet time of it with those currents that set in around the island!

"And me—huh! Looks like I'll have a sweet time of it, all right," thought Carson, as he stared out across the darkling waters. "Blazing sun tomorrow; no grub, no shirt, no water, no matches to make a signal smoke, no nothing. The damned lousy murderer! He'll go away with his woman and his pearls and tell a fancy story and be a blasted hero with money in his pocket—"

He laughed bitterly and turned away. His foot struck against something, lying near the discarded oars, that he had not previously observed; sand had been dashed over it, so that one would not readily notice it. He kicked at it, stared down, and a long, slow whistle came from his lips.

This object was the tiller of the boat, which he himself had unshipped.

Carson uttered a laugh which racked his body—a low and terrible laugh that rose into a shrill spasm of ironic mirth. King had put off without this tiller, doubtless had never seen it lying there. He might steer with an oar, except that he had left his knife ashore and the oars were lashed fast. Besides, it takes a seaman to handle a boat with an oar for rudder. There were any number of things King might do, but small probability that he would do any of them.

"Ho-ho!" cried out Carson, holding his sides, tears upon his cheeks. "Ho-ho! This a rich one, this is—the two of 'em—the owl and the pussycat goin' to sea—"

He felt his knees weakening and cared not a whit. Exhaustion, shock, weakness, all at once claimed him, as though with the daylight his strength had ebbed also. He quietly dropped in the sand and lay there, above high water mark, as the night drew down; and his coma passed into a natural and deep slumber.

Dawn came again, and daylight, with the spears of sunrise threatening the eastern sky.

Carson sat up and rubbed his eyes, until twinges of pain in his side recalled him to reality. It was the day he had dreaded to see break; another hour, and the merciless sun would be high enough to smite him down. He must hunt shelter among the rocks, perhaps a pool of rain water remaining—

He stiffened, staring amazedly at the water, then rose to his feet. Something was floating there, swinging slowly along at the edge of the current—something like a dead porpoise. But it was no porpoise, nor any other fish. Carson rubbed the sleep from his eyes, blinking out at the water, a scant twenty yards from shore, where the thing floated. He visualized it abruptly—a boat, capsized, floating bottom up, a half submerged tangle of gear alongside betraying where mast and dragging canvas were adrift. A boat? No, by the gods! *His* boat!

Not hesitating, Carson walked down to the water, walked into it, threw himself forward and began to swim.

Half an hour afterward he had the boat on the sand. For all the effort, for all the pain it caused, he presently got her turned over. And now he saw something else. The plug was clear gone out of her bottom, and the hole was stoppered in an agonized sort of way with the fragments of an embroidered silk coat.

Carson looked out at the water. Nothing there. Nothing here in or about the boat to tell of what had happened; but what more did he need? The rudderless craft, the puffs of wind, the plug somehow knocked out and lost in the darkness—

"Well," he observed, recovering from his stupefaction, "maybe Providence does know its way around after all! Now, if the fool had sense enough to put the grub and brandy into the locker—"

He opened the watertight compartment. Yes, King had had sense enough for that—and an abrupt oath fell from Carson's lips as his fingers touched something else and drew it forth. It was the shagreen case, with contents intact—and a pearl necklace added.

Later the following appeared in the Hongkong *Daily Press:*

> The sole survivor of the ill fated *Feng Shan* arrived in port last night aboard the *Tenyo Maru.* James Carson, first officer of the luckless craft, was picked up in an otherwise empty boat; he was badly knocked about, and had incurred two bullet wounds in the course of the scrimmage following the striking of the ship. His full story, which has been secured exclusively for the *Daily Press,* will be found upon another page.

The story related by Carson, to the press and the underwriters and the owners and the admiralty court alike, was absolutely true in every detail. Human nature being what it is, however, one is not certain whether to regret or to rejoice that there was no mention whatever in this story of Lady Ming or of the man named King—and above all, no mention of the shagreen case.

No inquiries were ever made about it, however, or about its contents.

A WILD PIG HUNT ON THE JORDAN

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

MANY pilgrims have taken their way to the old Greek monastery that raises its wise old walls on the right bank of the River Jordan near the spot where, according to tradition, Christ was baptized by St. John. It is situated only a few miles from Jericho. But very few of the pilgrims have visited the swamps that lie opposite the monastery, across the river, on its left shore and beyond. In the fall of 1916, while I was serving in the Great War, I spent several nights hunting wild pigs in those swamps.

At that time I was second in command of the garrison of Es-Salt in East Jordanland, and it was there that some Arab scouts informed me that I could get what I was looking for by merely crossing the river and entering the swamp with a sharp eye and a ready gun. What I was looking for was ham. And I couldn't get it for love or money, because ham comes from pigs and pigs are called by the Mohammedans *pis domuslar*, meaning dirty swine, and they, like the Jews, abhor them. A pig to them is as repulsive, so far as the pleasures of the table are concerned, as a mangy dog to us, and only when driven by ravenous hunger will the true believer stoop down to partake of pig's flesh. So that I hadn't enjoyed a plate of ham and eggs for months, when the Arab scouts gave me the welcome news that the swamps across the Jordan were full of wild *pis domuslar*.

I took advantage of the first lull in the fighting to set out with my two orderlies to get myself and my German fellow officers an abundant supply of ham and, incidentally, to have some good sport. I was amused a short time after starting out by a starved Arab beggar who approached me while I was munching at a sandwich under a cactus tree by the roadside. He begged me to give him something to eat, adding at the end of his ceremonious request—

"*Beym*, give me a bite of something, even if it is only a piece of ham." One man's caviar is another man's mulligan!

I was hospitably received by the prior of the Greek monastery. He asked me to spend the night there and informed me that a professional wild pig hunter—a Greek—had just arrived from Jerusalem to spend a few days across the river, hunting. That was an agreeable coincidence, and it pleased my Mohammedan orderlies because it spared them the disgrace of having to touch the filthy pigs that I was going to kill.

That same afternoon I made arrangements with the Greek to accompany him to the swamps. We decided to cross the river that night because, as he explained to me, it was easier to approach the pigs in the darkness by emitting a series of grunting sounds similar to their own, which he produced by drawing his breath vigorously through the nostrils in a peculiar manner. He taught me how to grunt so quickly and so well that that very evening he mistook me for a pig and would have pumped me full of lead if I had not been slightly more talented than the pigs at the art of dodging bullets. As it happens, I have been dodging bullets all my life, and I know how.

We crossed the river in a canoe about nine o'clock that night. After traversing the belt of swamp vegetation that covers its left shore as far as its mouth, we took our shoes off so as to move as silently as possible and continued our progress in our stocking feet, seeking in the glare of the moonlight a certain intricate system of sloughs in the center of which the pigs were supposed to make their headquarters. I could not help getting a creepy feeling whenever the wailing snarl of the lynx-leopard floated mysteriously to us on the breeze from the swampy jungle of the Sor, or when some bitter and humorous hyena made up her mind to give us the horse laugh from beneath some nearby cactus bush. But worse and more practical drawbacks than these were those stocking feet of mine, which hurt to beat blazes as I walked over the hot ground covered with thorns and sharp edged pebbles.

When we finally reached the vicinity of the spot we were looking for, we were not long in coming upon a big herd of wild pigs which, to judge by the noise they made, grunting and squealing, must have totaled several dozen head. By that time my enthusiasm had abated considerably, for the thought came into my head that if one of those bristly creatures, feeling itself wounded, should make a rush for me—what then? Had I been to such trouble joining the war just to be killed by a pig? And I could easily be killed in that way, for there was not a decent tree to climb within one hundred miles. We would have to shoot straight or be ripped by a razorlike tusk six inches long.

After much crawling around on our bellies, sometimes sinking to the waist in the slimy waters, we placed ourselves within shooting distance of the herd. Not more than six yards from me, a wonderful specimen of a boar appeared from behind a bush. He loomed black as pitch in the moonlight, his long tusks gleaming like jeweled pendants. I confess that, althought I found the beast beautiful, I didn't like its looks a bit. The Greek, meanwhile, was raising his gun slowly, training its muzzle on another boar, which was browsing near him among the swamp reeds. Knowing that if I shot after the Greek did, I would be at a disadvantage against a warmed and infuriated herd, I let go and ducked—not a second too soon, for before the reports of our shots had died out the frightened herd stampeded for cover in my direction. They ran over me like a wave of hot, fearful life, while I sank up to my neck in the slimy morass and waited quietly for the beasts to kick off my head.

I can still hear the beat of their hoofs—like drums of an army of demons—as they tramped over me. I scarcely risked breathing until my companion reassured me. Then I looked around for my gun which I had dropped while thinking fast. The Greek scraped about twenty pounds of black mud from my clothes with his hunting knife, and then we went to seek the results of the skirmish. Each of us had killed his boar. Mine lay dead with the bullet lodged behind its right ear. The Greek's pig was still grunting and kicking with a shattered backbone.

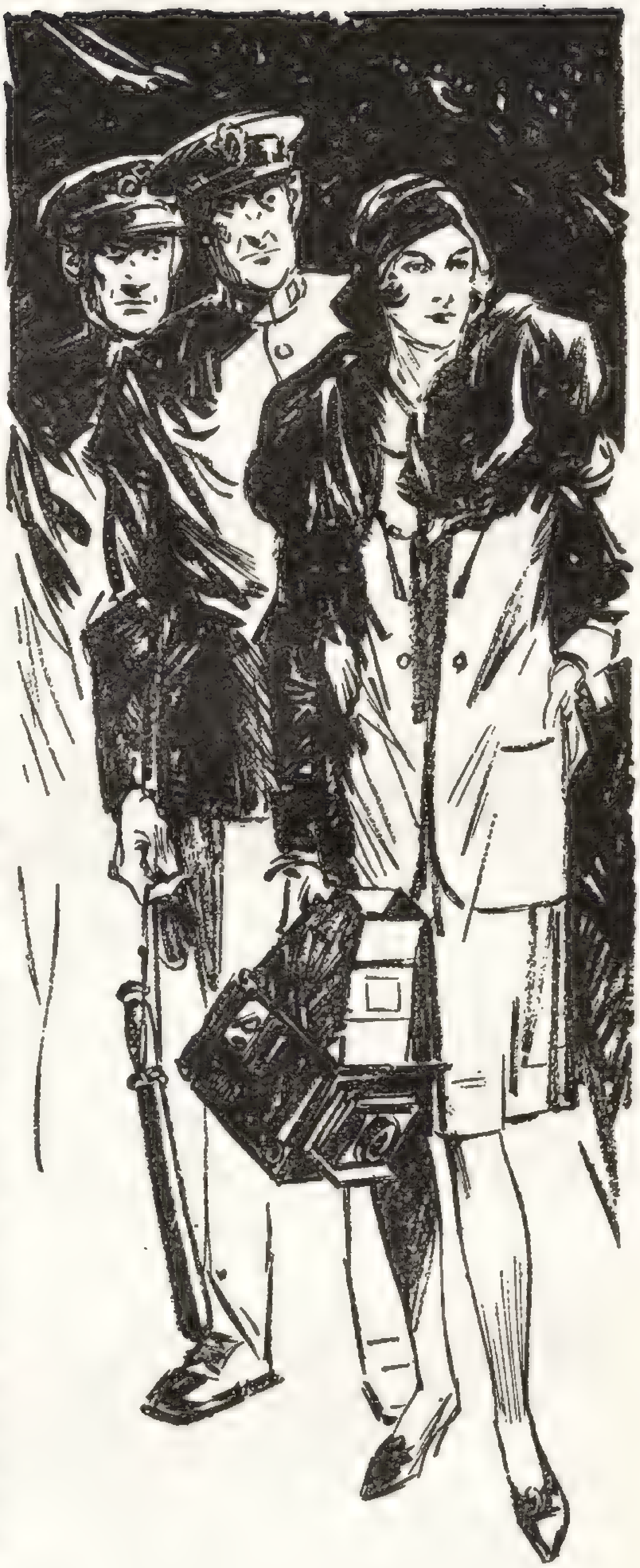
It was while I was examining my boar and grunting unconsciously that the Greek took a shot at me by mistake. The bullet entered the pig's belly, less than three inches away from my head.

In the early hours of the morning we recrossed the Jordan to get some much needed sleep at the monastery. I felt not only in need of a spiritual bath—I had cursed like a heretic—but also of a thorough physical cleansing. So I jumped into the river and had a good long bath exactly on the spot where, as the prior told me at lunch, Christ had been baptized. Hearing that, I regretted not having gone all the way back dirty as I was. I felt a guilty sense of irreverence that I found hard to get rid of.

SMART ENOUGH

By

HENRY LACOSSITT

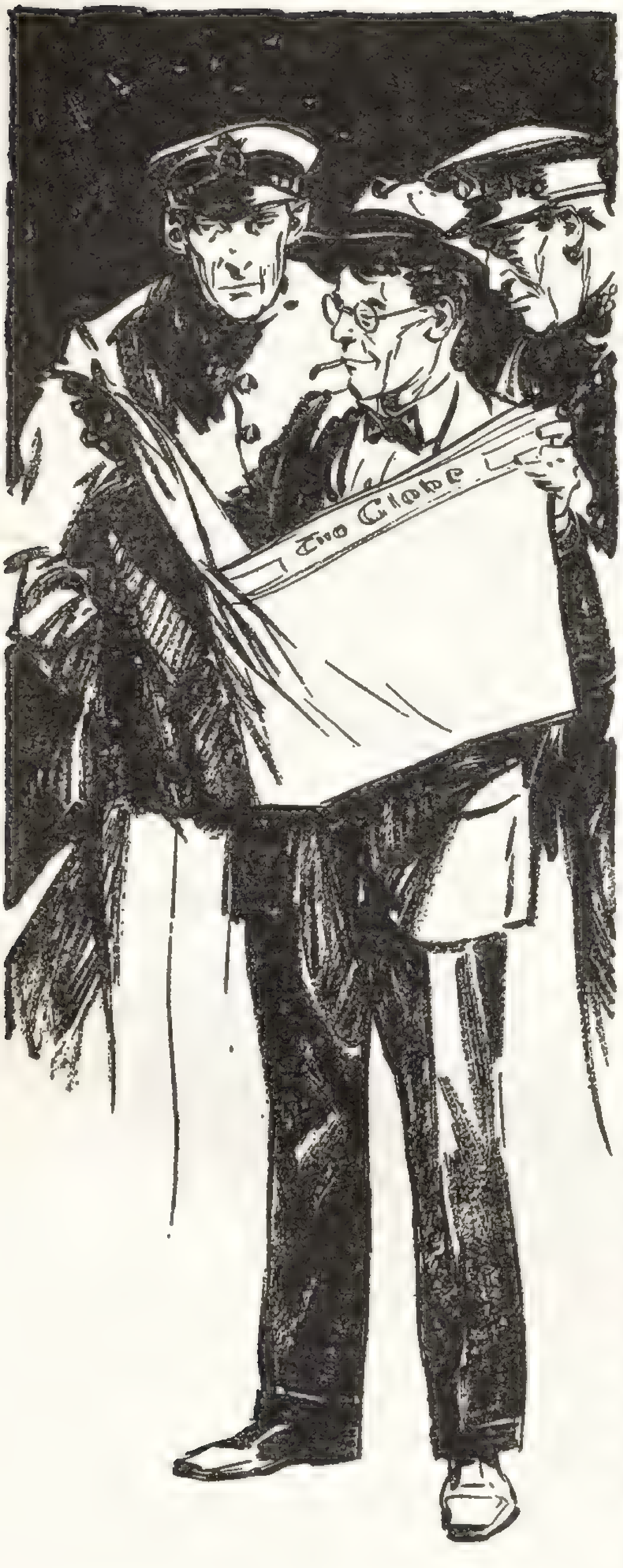


THE POLICE parade stretched for almost a mile along the avenue. It was a rather dreary affair of monotonous deep blue, enlivened only here and there by bands and spots of color. The bands played worn marches by Sousa and year old popular airs, the latter distorted out of natural rhythm into a cadence which followed the gleaming batons of the drum majors. The spots of color were platoons of *zouaves* with wands and, if you were familiar with the force, you might recognize cops who, in the ordinary course of events, would be at this corner or that, blowing whistles and shouting virulence. Now, in their garish uniforms, they performed outlandish figures raggedly and waved their wands and looked sheepish, much to the satisfaction of dismounted motorists who looked on and chuckled.

At the head of the parade rode the chief of police, a tall, gaunt man with iron gray mustaches which dropped below the sharp lines of his chops after the fashion of western sheriffs of popular memory. Surrounded by his inspectors, a curious and motley group of men, he reclined with folded arms in the tonneau of an immense car—which was driven by a patrolman with stony countenance—and looked very important. Just ahead of the car a squad of mounted policemen rode their horses at a walk.

The spectators who lined the sidewalk were silent, looking on, probably, because they had nothing else to do; for it was a meaningless spectacle, and one had the

A Novelette of an Eccentric Police Reporter with the Amazing Habit of Making His Own News



impatient feeling of wishing that it soon would be over. This feeling, from the faces in the marching lines, was shared by the police.

In the rear of the parade was another car. It crawled along leisurely, keeping close to the heels of the last line of cops, but it had no place in the procession—it was a civilian automobile and bore no police insignia.

In it were a young man and woman.

The man's appearance was not striking. His clothes, one could see, were only ordinary, of mediocre quality and cut, and a little old. So, too, with his hat; and his body was not large. His face, shaded imperfectly by the old hat, was freckled, smooth shaven, although at close range it would have been apparent that, for all of his age, which was nearly thirty, a coat of sandy fuzz overspread his cheeks. On his upper lip, above a thin mouth which ended in complex lines that always seemed in motion, was an original mustache which was never noticed. And sneaking from beneath the old felt hat were strands of unruly sandy hair.

He wore tortoise shell spectacles, and behind them a pair of queer blue eyes twinkled. These eyes were the only remarkable thing about him. They were searching and very deep. And they missed nothing—as the car rolled slowly after the procession—either in the crowd that lined the sidewalks or in the parade in front.

Curiously, he paid little attention to the young woman who sat beside him.

She was pretty, but she, too, was not unusual. She wore no hat and her hair, a medium brown, was bobbed. Her eyes too were brown, and their gaze swung slowly from one side of the street to the other. She looked, indeed, as if she were very bored and as if she were not in the least enjoying the ride. She was apparently puzzled, for she was carrying a camera and, in obedience to the young man who drove beside her, she was taking pictures at salient points along the line of march. The pictures included the car against the background of the parade.

The young man with the queer blue eyes and the tortoise shell glasses had followed the parade from its start. And he had paid no attention at all to the question which, at almost every block along the route, had been asked by the young woman who rode with him.

"Jonesey," she had said, until any other than this particular young man would have snarled, "why *are* you following this stupid parade?"

She varied this occasionally with—

"And where *did* you get this stupid car?"

Or—

"Why *are* you taking these silly pictures?"

To these questions the young man addressed as Jonesey made, in answer, remarks on the weather, on the standing of the American League, on Farm Relief, or said nothing at all.

When Jonesey did, however, run across a likely cop who, spared the walk by the chief of police, stood and held a crowd that had no wish to be enthusiastic and disorderly, in orderliness, he called out to him. To these cops he would call attention to the car in which he rode and ask how they liked it. Each said it looked like a fair job and each seemed to know Jonesey quite well. Each seemed, moreover, a little sullen and defiant and inclined to be annoyed. Likewise they were puzzled when the girl with whom Jonesey rode snapped their pictures, Several of them asked why he was following the parade. To these he made the same replies that he had made to the girl.

And each time Jonesey spoke to these men the girl asked—

"Jonesey, who *is* that ab-*surd* looking cop?"

"That, Mamie," he would reply, "is John Law. Take his picture!"

The parade wound its way down the avenue, through the heart of the business district—where facetious stenographers and office boys, imitating Manhattan receptions, dumped wastebaskets full of various objects on the marching cops—and ended at Central Police Headquarters. It was only an annual affair, this parade, for which everybody was glad.

The chief pulled up in front of the station and alighted with his inspectors. As he did he was hailed from a car which had drawn up behind the immense affair in which he had ridden.

"Hello, Chief. Like the ride?"

"Don't be smart, Jonesey! Where'd you get that crate?"

"Picked it up for practically nothing, didn't I, Mamie?"

"I'll say you did—you've—"

"Mamie," said Jonesey, "you can do your stuff."

Mamie took her camera and got out. She took a picture of the chief of police and his inspectors standing in front of Jonesey's automobile while Jonesey talked to the chief.

"I followed the parade, Chief," Jonesey was saying, "until you got down to 14th Street. Then I swung off and cut around and through the alley by the station here and pulled up behind you. I wanted to greet you at the end of your triumphal march."

"Oh, yeh?" said the chief. "What you mean—followin' the parade?"

"I was just seein' if the department was well heeled, wasn't I, Mamie?"

"I'll say he was. He was—"

"Mamie," said Jonesey, "did you get that picture?"

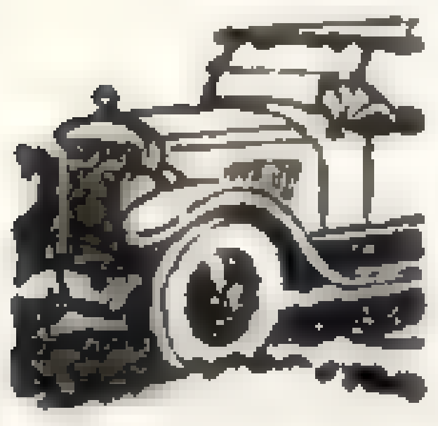
"Yes."

"Then get in. You'll see it in the papers tomorrow, Chief."

The chief and the inspectors looked

quite important as Mamie got in the car and Jonesey prepared to take off. But then the expressions of the chief and his inspectors became puzzled and annoyed. For Jonesey, as he drove off said something else. And it sounded something like—

"An' it's too bad they ain't colored an' in the Sunday edition."



JONESEY drove his car around the block and let Mamie out. She had shopping to do, she said. She gave Jonesey the camera and roll of used films and left him—with a final question concerning the afternoon's activities, the answer to which was vaguely ridiculous—to go his own peculiar way.

He drove, when she had gone, back uptown.

Jonesey had, since his adolescence, which many said was permanent, been a newspaper man. In his early teens he had carried newspapers. Later he had become a copy boy in the city room and after that he had written obituaries. Because, however, he chose to make limericks out of the obituaries, he had been fired from the newspaper with which he had started, and in regular rotation thereafter he had jumped from one sheet to another, each astoundingly glad to hire him and each not so astoundingly glad to get rid of him.

Jonesey was, said every editor in town, impossible.

He had done every beat in The Town for every newspaper. Chiefly, however, was he identified with the police beat, and it was said that he knew every cop on the force. Whether this was true, every cop on the force knew Jonesey; for at one time or another each had had occasion to cross his eccentric path, and each, like the editors, considered him, in more forceful language, impossible. Each, also, was profoundly irritated by Jonesey's antics.

Jonesey had been in jail many times.

He had the knack of seeing two stories where but one appeared on the surface and he was openly antagonistic to and contemptuous of the force. His chief delight was to expose the force, which he did with regularity and rare satire and which had caused, several times, big shake-ups in the department. Therefore, when Jonesey's course took him just a bit beyond the pale of the law, he received all the law could pile on his sandy head. Once he had done a stretch in the county jail. But that had been disastrous. His subsequent articles in one of the newspapers had caused the removal and demotion of the warden and the formation of a committee to investigate conditions. Since then the police had been wary. But they were watchful and they only hoped that once—just once—he would step into something that would—for them—be foolproof.

Right now Jonesey was engaged in baiting the present chief of police. Particularly, did he find the chief's mustaches good copy, and he also found much in the chief's handling of the department that he considered not up to snuff. These opinions, veiled with news, went into the columns of the *Globe*, anti-administration paper, on the staff of which Jonesey happened at the present time to be laboring.

But if the police were not quite sure of him, neither were the editors. Jonesey was, before everything else in their point of view, irresponsible. There was the time when, working for the *Press*, he had vanished without trace and no one had heard of him for two months, only to turn up with reams of copy at which the managing editor, enraged, would not look. The copy subsequently appeared for many days in an esteemed contemporary of the *Press* and caused nation wide furor. It was—The Town was on the Great Lakes—a sensational story of lake freighters and the conditions aboard them. Jonesey's copy brought congressmen and committees from Washington and caused laws to be passed. And the paper would have submitted it for the Pulitzer Prize had the managing editor not become enraged at Jonesey and kicked him out.

Now, as he drove uptown after the

police parade, he had been absent from the *Globe* for ten days. During that period, moreover, he had not so much as called his office, nor had he communicated in any way with his employers. Neither had he told them that he would be absent. He had not, however, hidden himself. He had been around town and in plain view most of the time, driving his mysterious automobile.

He reached the *Globe* building and drove up to the curb, where he parked the car. He remained in it for awhile after he had parked it, sitting idly and watching the slow approach of a cop who had left his post at the intersection of four busy blocks and who was taking a small rest. When the cop had almost reached the car, Jonesey hailed him—

"Hello, Jake."

The cop looked up. He saw who had hailed him and immediately was on the defensive.

"Hi, Jonesey."

"How you like my new car, Jake?"

"O.K, I guess—why?"

"Oh, just wondered. Say, Jake, will you stand by the car a minute?"

Jake was suspicious, but he said he would. Jonesey got out. He took with him the camera and the rolls of used films.

"Jake," Jonesey went on, "will you put your hand on the hood? I want to take a picture. We're gonna run some stuff and I'd like to have a picture of you."

Jake was flattered. He put his hand on the hood and posed. Jonesey went around the car and snapped a picture of the cop, the car and the *Globe* building.

"Thanks, Jake," he said, when he had taken the picture. "Anything doin'?"

"Not much around here, Jonesey," said Jake. "Only they was a bunch o' housebreaks an' stickups in the outlyin' districts durin' the parade today. The chief's higher'n a kite. Threatenin' to shake up the force an' can half the looies. Gonna put fifty clothes guys back in harness. Jeez, I'd like a shot at that clothes stuff. Standin' on a pavement an' blowin' a whistle ain't so hot, you know it?"

"I guess it ain't," said Jonesey. "Chief any idea who's doin' these jobs?"

"He says he thinks it's the Garotta mob, an' has rounded all suspicious characters up. He's gonna raise hell, I guess. Wish to God I'd get somethin' out of it."

"Hope you do, Jake," said Jonesey. He walked off.

He walked around the corner of the *Globe* building to the rear and went into the employees' entrance. He rang the freight elevator bell and waited. The clumsy car came down slowly with a soft, slurring sound. The door slammed open and revealed an old man who stood in a litter of old newspapers. He stared when he saw Jonesey and then he smiled.

"For the love o' heaven, Jonesey!" said the old man. "Where you been?"

"I been huntin'."

"Huntin'?"

"Yeah—huntin' a real cop. There ain't any."

The old man was puzzled.

"The boss," he said, "is on his ear, he's that sore. Says he's gonna throw you down the shaft when he sees you. Says you're the biggest bum in the newspaper game. Says you're the—"

"I'm goin' up," said Jonesey.

"Yeah—you would," said the old man. "An' you know he ain't in no pretty humor since—"

"I know," said Jonesey.

THE BIG elevator rose slowly to the sixth floor. Jonesey walked out and down the hall to a door with frosted glass on which was painted in black letters, "City Room." He opened this door and entered a huge office in which typewriters were clattering. There was pleasant confusion in the room, and no one noticed that Jonesey had entered. He walked through the gate in the railing that marked the limit of visitors' progress and toward a desk which sat against one wall, in a line of other similar desks.

There he put down the camera and took out a roll of films. These he placed beside the other rolls of films. Then he opened the desk, which action swung a typewriter into view, and inserted a sheet of paper in the typewriter. He sat down.

"Boy!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

The clattering of the other typewriters ceased as the one belonging to Jonesey began a weird tattoo. Jonesey was beating it viciously with two fingers.

"Boy!" he yelled at the top of his voice again, but did not stop beating the typewriter.

The silence in the big room then would have been complete except for the racket of Jonesey's typewriter. And then a low muttering began . . .

"He's back."

"On a drunk, maybe."

"The boss'll throw him out."

"Damn' fool."

A boy approached Jonesey and stopped before his desk. Jonesey did not look up from his typewriting.

"Take these," he said, "down the hall and have them developed."

The boy ran off with the films. Jonesey went on writing.

From a desk in the middle of the room a man arose. His eyes were on Jonesey, and they were not pleasant. He pushed an eyeshade back from his brow and walked slowly and deliberately across the room toward Jonesey. He stopped at Jonesey's desk and stood, watching the man beneath him.

Jonesey did not look up. He had pushed his hat back on his sandy head and a cigaret hung from a thin lower lip. He was writing furiously now.

"You dirty bum!" said the man with the eyeshade.

"Hello, Bill," said Jonesey and changed a sheet of paper.

"Don't Bill me. You're fired!"

"Sure," said Jonesey. "Did you ever get your car back?"

"What the hell is that to you?" said Bill. "Get out!"

"Sure," said Jonesey, "I'll do that in a minute. Your car's downstairs, Bill."

"My car—" began Bill.

"Yeah," went on Jonesey, still writing. "It's parked near the side entrance. In good condition, too. You oughtn't to leave the key in the switch, Bill."

The man addressed as Bill was silent. An expression of exasperation overspread his countenance. The office, still silent save for Jonesey's galloping typewriter, waited.

"If you'll just wait a minute, Bill," went on Jonesey, "I'll explain it to you. Go on over an' relax. I haven't seen you, but I'll bet you're sweatin' to beat hell."

"Aw hell!" said Bill and walked back to his desk.

He reached it and seated himself. He eyed Jonesey for a moment. Then he called back—

"You're fired just the same, you red headed bum!"

"Sure," said Jonesey, and went on punishing the typewriter.

The others in the room gradually resumed their racket; Jonesey went on. He wrote for almost an hour, during which time the films he had given the boy had been developed. When he had finished he looked at his wrist watch. It was six-thirty. Jonesey pulled the last sheet from his typewriter and assembled what he had written. Then he took the sheets and the developed pictures over to the city desk, where Bill sat.

Jonesey threw the pictures on top of the proof Bill was reading and laid the typewritten sheets to one side. Bill started angrily and then he froze in his chair. He grabbed the pictures and went through them rapidly. When he had finished with them he seized the typed sheets Jonesey had written. He read Jonesey's lead. In spite of himself he laughed. He looked up at Jonesey, lingering anger fading from his face.

"You can make the street edition with that easy, Bill," said Jonesey.

But Bill said nothing. He only looked at Jonesey, and now a smile and a look of wonder overspread his face. He shook his head helplessly.

"Jonesey," he said, "you're a red

headed bum! You're a dirty red headed bum! You're hired!"

"Sure," said Jonesey. "I'm gonna eat now. Don't leave the key in the switch any more, Bill."

"All right, all right," said Bill. "Hurry back. I want somethin' on this burglary chain, an' I want you to do it. Don't run off, will you, Jonesey?" There was almost a pleading note in Bill's voice.

"No," said Jonesey, "I won't run off."

He walked out of the city room.

Once more there was silence. Every eye in the city room, including those of Bill, who was city editor, was looking at Jonesey. But Jonesey walked on, oblivious. He reached the door with the frosted glass and vanished.

As he did, Bill galvanized into action.

"Boy!" he yelled. "Two boys!" And the city room began once more to clatter.

The street edition of the *Globe*, which was the leading morning daily of The Town, carried, on Pages 2 and 3, a large spread, full of pictures and containing a story—which story Jonesey had written—which began in the lead column on Page 1 under scareheads. Also, it began under Jonesey's by-line.

The headlines read:

HOPELESS INEFFICIENCY OF POLICE DEPARTMENT REVEALED

Globe Reporter Steals Editor's Car; Keeps It Ten Days; Shows It To Chief and Inspectors

MOTORCYCLE MEN AND PATROLMEN, TOO

Theft of Machine Broadcast Over City; Drives at End of Police Parade, Is Not Questioned Once

Jonesey's story then told, in lurid and accusing phrases, of how he had stolen the car; how he had kept it for ten days; how he had shown it to every cop on the force he could find; how he had asked the chief and inspectors if they liked his car; how he had driven behind the parade and asked the cops at almost every block how they liked his car. The story explained, too, how well known was the editor; how the police should have retained, because of his prominence, a graphic memory of the license number and the description of the car.

And there on Pages 2 and 3 were the pictures to prove the story.

The spread of pictures was clustered about a huge central one, an enlarged reproduction of the chief of police, with his inspectors standing looking at the car, the license plate of which loomed prominently. Also, the picture showed Jonesey talking to them, his hand indicating that he was talking about the car. Also, there was a photograph of Jake, the traffic cop, standing in front of the *Globe* building, his hand on the hood.

The *Globe* would not, perhaps, have made so much of the affair had it not been anti-administration in policy, but, as it was, Jonesey's stunt was rare editorial grist, and his story was accompanied by a scathing editorial and cartoon, both of which attacked the police department and the chief.

The paper went to the streets at nine o'clock. Jonesey was just then entering the *Globe* building on his way back to work. He went up to the city room again and crossed to the editor's desk. Bill greeted him.

"Jonesey," said Bill, "that was a swell piece of work—but I could 'a' killed you."

"Sure," said Jonesey.

"But you ought," Bill went on, "to let somebody know where you are and what you're doin'. Somethin' might happen to you sometime and nobody'd pay any attention to your bein' gone."

"Sure," said Jonesey, "I know."

"You damn' fool. Well, listen. The chief—"

"That punk," contributed Jonesey.

"Is roundin' up the Garotta gang. He thinks they've been doin' all these jobs. About forty homes got burglarized today durin' the parade, and there was plenty of holdups in broad daylight. There was a leak somewhere. Somebody knew, in spite of the announcements of a full force, that there were skeleton units at certain places, and it was in those districts that the burglaries and robberies took place. This is swell stuff and we can play it big because of your story. The burglaries don't amount to much in themselves, but when you lump 'em all together and talk of inefficiency, they do. Now I want you to go to the station and talk to the boys. They'll give you the dope you need. And then see what you can scrape up. I want a big story by day after tomorrow. We'll play your story and a feeler on this in the last edition in the morning. I want your new story for the final day after tomorrow."

Jonesey left.

OUTSIDE, The Town went about its night's play. Crowds moved along the sidewalks on the way to theaters and night clubs, great streams of humanity, and among them Jonesey walked, a solitary, unimportant figure. Among them, also, moved the newsboys from the *Globe* hawking Jonesey's story. And Jonesey, who had forgotten to look at a paper in the office, bought one. He chuckled over the setup and moved across the street to the Public Square.

The sidewalks of the square were filled with loitering groups which lingered in the brilliance of shop fronts. And on one corner Jonesey saw the uniforms of several policemen who were talking to several plainclothesmen. He knew all of them, and he sauntered up to them. They were talking earnestly and heatedly and did not notice him. They were talking, moreover, about Jonesey, and one of them held a copy of the *Globe* in his hand.

"Hello, boys," said Jonesey.

They turned. They glared at him.

"Oh, hello," they said, almost in chorus; and then again almost in chorus, "Wise guy!"

"Sure," said Jonesey.

"Well," said a plainclothesman, "some day maybe you won't be so wise. Maybe you'll learn it ain't wise to be wise, you red headed bum!"

Jonesey looked around the group. He was mildly surprised at the virulence of their looks and tones. Then he shrugged.

"Maybe," he said, and walked off.

He did not look behind him and he put the surprising rage of the officers out of his thoughts. He did not see, because he did not look behind him, that one of the plainclothesmen, after a hurried consultation with the rest, had darted into a drug store, and that another had begun to follow him.

Jonesey walked on across the square, stopping here and there to notice this and that, and then moved leisurely through a little walk that ran between two high buildings. This took him out on a dark street on which, several blocks away, the police station fronted. Jonesey, however, stopped at a dingy appearing front and entered a pair of swinging doors, through which the pleasant, drowsy odor of beer sifted.

He walked up to the bar.

"Hello, Jimmy," he said to the bartender. "A short one."

The bartender drew a short one, which Jonesey drank, and he ordered another one. When he had finished it he walked toward the rear of the speakeasy and around a corner, which led to a side entrance, and where was a telephone booth. He went into the booth. He shoved his hat back on his head and dropped a nickel.

Jonesey was calling Mamie.

Mamie was Jonesey's girl. She always had been Jonesey's girl. She accepted him where every one else rejected him, and she usually in the last analysis agreed with him. He infuriated her, but she appeared to like that. He treated her abominably, according to some lights, but she appeared to like that also. He probably never would marry her—he had, in fact, told her often that, as far as matrimony was concerned, she was wasting her time—but she did not worry about that. She was, in her own peculiar way, content to be Jonesey's girl. And Jonesey's girl she was. There had been others who had aspired to Mamie, but they never had been able to farther than a tentative kiss. Mamie was, after that, undoubtedly Jonesey's girl.

She was one of those women who like a man for apparently no reason at all. She had aided Jonesey many times, and mightily, in the prosecution of many a story.

"Hel-*low*-o-o. . . ."

Jonesey shifted.

"Hello," he said. "How's old mama?"

"Don't mama me, you bum. Where you been?"

"Huntin'."

"Huntin'? Huntin' what?"

"A real cop. There ain't any."

"Jonesey, you're a *per*-fect idiot."

"Sure, I might 'a' known I couldn't find any. Seen the papers Mamie?"

"Jonesey, if I never see one of those ab-*surd* newspapers again it'll be too soon."

"I know, but look just once more at the *Globe*."

"Why?"

Jonesey told her in detail.

"Why, Jonesey," said Mamie when he had finished, "how *per*-fectly spiffy. And to think that I took all the pictures. . . ."

"Yeh, you took 'em. Well, gotta go. I'm gonna do somethin' special for Bill. I'm—"

Jonesey's conversation stopped abruptly. A moment before he had turned, so that he slouched in the corner of the booth, and he could see out of the booth through the glass of the door. He was looking, now, out into the corridor of the speakeasy that led to the side entrance, and which was hidden from the rest of the place. And his queer blue eyes, idle and almost blank a moment before, suddenly had become alert.

For Jonesey saw, through the glass in the door, a group of men. They were plainclothesmen. Among them was the man who had darted into the drug store a few minutes before and the man who had followed Jonesey across the square. Then there were three others. And they all had fixed their hard eyes on Jonesey.

"Yes?" came Mamie's voice.

Jonesey pulled himself out of his slouching position and took hold of the knob of the door. He grinned and bowed ironically to the plainclothesmen. Then he turned to the mouthpiece and began speaking in lowered tones.

"Mamie," he said, "there's a bunch o' bulls just outside the door to this booth. They just came. They're after me, I think. I know they are—" Jonesey's voice became as that of a man under exertion. "They're tryin' to get in to me, but I'm holdin' the knob. I can't hold much longer, though. . . . I ain't Tarzan. . . . They'll have me in a minute. . . . Sore about the story, I guess." Jonesey's voice labored, now, under greater exertion, "I'm about to be framed, Mamie—but don't tell Bill or anybody at the shop. . . . Try an' see me, though. . . . They'll smuggle me somewhere. . . . probably to central station so the chief can bawl at me. See you—"

Jonesey's strength gave out. The door flew open with a crash and pulled him, as he still held the knob, with it. He fell out of the booth into the arms of a burly detective. From the hanging receiver in the booth came the faint, mechanized voice of Mamie, calling frantically. The detectives, however, hauled him to the entrance.

"Who was you talkin' to?" asked one of the plainclothesmen.

"My gal," said Jonesey.

They appeared satisfied with that and rushed him out of the place.

"Say," said Jonesey, "I ain't paid Jimmy for two short ones, yet."

"You," snarled one of the plainclothesmen, "ain't payin' nobody but us from now on—see?"

"Oh, sure," said Jonesey.

THEY hurried him into a car and drove the short distance to the police station. They drove into a driveway that led along one side of the gloomy structure and slipped through a gate in a great stone wall that shut off the courtyard that lay between the police station and the jail.

Over this courtyard, leading from one building to the other, stretched the bridge of sighs.

The five plainclothesmen hauled Jonesey across the courtyard.

"Whoopee!" said Jonesey. "What my sheet won't have to say about you boys."

One of the plainclothesmen put his hand against Jonesey's jaw. Jonesey felt the cold metal of brass knuckles.

"Oh, sure," said Jonesey, "if you feel that way, I won't holler—right now."

The knuckles pressed harder when Jonesey said that "right now." And then, abruptly, they were pulled away. Jonesey cringed a little, for he imagined a blow. But it did not come, and they reached a flight of stairs leading to the basement of the station. Down these they shoved him, and into a small room, where they ringed themselves around him. One of them went to a wall telephone.

"Chief," said the man at the phone, "we got him here."

He hung up and turned back to Jonesey. Jonesey had lighted a cigaret. He looked around the circle of his captors.

"Well—" said Jonesey.

"The chief'll talk to you, bum," said the man who had telephoned.

"Do tell," said Jonesey. "Mr. Jones, the well known journalist, was guest of honor at a party in the police station last night. Those present were five dumb cops and the chief of police. The chief poured—" Jonesey paused, as he inhaled deeply— "a lot o' hooey as usual," he finished.

"What!"

The voice came from the door. The gaunt form of the chief of police stood there. He charged up to Jonesey and grabbed that young man by the necktie. He pulled and shook violently. Jonesey's hat fell off.

"Hooey, huh?" snarled the chief. "A lot o' hooey, huh? You'll take that hooey an' like it—see?"

The chief stopped shaking Jonesey. The reporter was gasping.

"Big—and brave—and strong—ain't you, Chief?" said Jonesey.

The chief pulled back a bony hand and slapped Jonesey across the face. The tortoise shell spectacles fell off and left the reporter's face with the peculiar undressed look the habitual wearer of glasses assumes without his spectacles. But the blue eyes, naked now, smoldered. Jonesey half rose from his chair, his whole body taut. But then he relaxed. He ran his hand over the red place on his cheek where the chief had slapped him. He laughed.

"True to form, ain't you—you big punk!"

The chief advanced again, but Jonesey only looked at him. The chief stopped suddenly. Jonesey picked up his spectacles. He put them on. He peered steadily through them at the chief until the man dropped his eyes.

"You know, Chief," went on Jonesey, "I was just talkin' to your estimable assistant, here—" he pointed to the man who had pressed the brass knuckles against his face— "about the many nice things the *Globe* will have to say about you and these boys."

The chief glared at Jonesey. Then he smirked. He looked around the ring of plainclothesmen who confirmed his smirk with leers of their own.

"Ain't that a laugh?" said the chief.

"Ain't it?" said one of the plainclothesmen.

The chief pulled a warrant from his pocket.

"This," he said to Jonesey, "is a warrant for your arrest, young fella."

"Sure," said Jonesey, "an' I'm gonna interview the President next Saturday. Will you give me an escort?"

"Smart," said the chief. "Ain't he, boys? But he ain't quite smart enough. This is a warrant for one John Doe—ever hear of him, Jonesey?"

"Yeh, I heard of him. I been thinkin' o' suggestin' him for police chief. He couldn't be any worse."

The chief ignored that.

"John Doe, you see," went on the chief, "has gone an' glommed a car that ain't his. He's kept the car for ten days an' he has staged a parade with the car without a permit from the police department. Therefore, John Doe is arrested an' held without bail—he's a dangerous character, this John Doe—pendin' trial, which *might* come up next year, an' might not. At any rate, John Doe has got a nice long rest comin' to him an' the police department is goin' to be his host."

Jonesey looked hard at the chief. He lighted another cigaret.

"DO YOU think," Jonesey asked, "you can get away with that?"

"Ain't that a laugh?" said the chief.

"Ain't it?" said one of the plainclothesmen.

"What," said Jonesey, "do you think the *Globe*'ll have to say about that when John Doe gets out?"

"*When* is right," said the chief. "John Doe, pendin' trial for stealin' a car, is kept in close confinement an'—"

"Yeh," said Jonesey, "but close confinement ends."

"Maybe," said the chief. "Maybe not. Close confinement might be unhealthy for the tough Mr. Doe. There ain't, anyway—" he brought his thin face down close to Jonesey's—"any closer confinement than six feet o' ground."

The threat startled Jonesey. He lurched forward a bit in his chair, and the blue eyes beneath the tortoise shell spectacles became deeper than ever as they went swiftly around the circle of plainclothesmen before they came to rest on the face of the chief. He was incredulous, but there flooded over him then a chill. It was, however, only momentary. His observant and analytical mind clicked.

He asked himself, in a few seconds that followed the chief's amazing and sinister statement, why he should be threatened. Why, also, should the consideration occur to the chief? Jonesey still half doubted the threat, but he admitted it as a possible reality. He had, of course, baited the chief and satirized him unmercifully, but that was no reason for murder in the mind of a normal and honest man. And then Jonesey ceased to doubt. He needed to go no further. He felt, then, that the threat was real. It was not the threat, so much—he was not the type who would be frightened by such a threat unduly—it was the fact that the man considered it and that these five burly cops in plainclothes seemed not in the least surprised by it. This started his reasoning on another tack. But he gave no hint.

He dragged heavily on his cigaret and dropped it to the floor. Deliberately and slowly, his head down and his eyes studying his shoes, he crushed it out with his heel. Then he raised his head and looked at the chief.

"No," he said, "there ain't much closer confinement than that, is there, Chief?"

"I'll say not," said the chief, and laughed. "An' you know the eccentric Mr. Jones, alias Mr. Doe, don't you? The eccentric Mr. Jones is off takin' trips on lake freighters an' pictures o' the police department bein' inefficient."

Jonesey laughed.

"You kinda got me, ain't you, Chief?" he said. "But I got to do my job, anyway. I was sent down to get some dope. Know anything more about these burglaries an' robberies durin' the parade?"

The chief and the five plainclothesmen looked hard at Jonesey. Then they laughed.

"You can say," said the chief, mocking the tone of an official being interviewed, "that we've got every available man on the case, an' that we're doin' all in our power to apprehend the powerful gang o' criminals that are threatenin' the security of our city. Ain't that a laugh?"

"Ain't it?" said one of the plainclothesmen.

"Thanks," said Jonesey. "The chief of police, in an *exclusive* interview late yesterday with a *Globe* reporter, issued a—lot o' hooey as usual. Ain't that a laugh?"

"Ain't—" The plainclothesman checked himself just in time.

The situation was evidently becoming tiresome for him.

The chief glared at the man and then turned to Jonesey. He swore savagely.

"Yeh?" he blurted. "An' I said you'd take that hooey an' like it—see?" He advanced on Jonesey.

Jonesey took off his spectacles.

"Chief," he said, "I gotta take precautions. If you're gonna be brave an' strong again, smack me on the other cheek. I usually turn it."

The chief swung. Jonesey ducked. The blow grazed the top of his head and knocked his sandy hair askew. He put up his arm to protect his face.

"Aw hell!" said the chief and strode to the door. "Take him on up, you guys, before I break his damn' neck." The chief went out the door.

Three of the plainclothesmen followed him. The other two jerked Jonesey to his feet. Then they marched him out into the dark courtyard between the jail and the police station, and up a flight of stairs. There one of them went ahead and whispered to a cop. The cop nodded, and closed a door leading to an office, where there were likely to be reporters. Jonesey then was hurried down a long corridor to an elevator. The elevator took him and the two plainclothesmen to the top tier of cells, where he was led the length of the building and shoved into a cell which was the last in the tier and the farthest from the courtyard side of the jail. At the end of this tier, on the courtyard side, Jonesey knew, was the bridge of sighs.

The plainclothesmen left him to his own devices. They said nothing. Only in the cruel grips on his arms and the ruthless manner in which they threw him into the cell did they show the hatred they felt for him.

This hatred was what surprised Jonesey. He was perhaps more surprised than he ever had been in his life. Never in his strange career had he come in contact with murderous intent before. That is, as far as he himself was concerned. He had, of course, been an observer in many blood feuds. He knew, of course, what animated these blood feuds, and he had viewed them coldly and impersonally. Now one of them was directed against himself.

He turned the light of his experience on the situation and he thought on the cases he had been assigned to and of the motives of the criminals concerned. This reasoning he applied to the motives of the chief of police and the five plainclothesmen. Obviously, they wanted him out of the way. But why? He answered that: because they were afraid of him. But why were they afraid of him? Surely, he thought, not because of his antagonism; not because of his attacks on the department. Those were, he knew that they must know, simply in line with the policy of the *Globe*, which pushed anything that would react against the city administration. And he knew that officials expect that sort of thing. The chief of police had been in politics for years; he, certainly, was accustomed to attacks on his administration of public affairs. But—

Jonesey sat up in his bunk and stared out into the murk of the prison. It had just occurred to him that public affairs might be perverted in behalf of private affairs.

He thought about that as he smoked cigaret after cigaret—in defiance of the smoking rule—until his eyes grew heavy and he lay back on his bunk. His mind whirled in drowsiness and he saw the chief of police, the five plainclothesmen, the parade, the stolen car, the photograph of the chief and the inspectors grouped around the stolen car, and the mysterious burglaries during the police parade supposed to have been committed by Tony Garotta . . .

JONESEY fell into a troubled sleep.

He dreamed he was driving Bill's stolen car right down the line of marching policemen, bowling over their blue figures until he came to the chief. He ran his car straight into that in which the chief rode, and as he overturned it he saw Tony Garotta and his mob emerge from beneath it. They surrounded him and put guns to his head.

The chief approached him and slapped him.

"Ain't it a laugh?" the chief said as he slapped Jonesey.

"Ain't it?"

But it was not the echoing plainclothesman who answered in Jonesey's dream. It was Tony Garotta.

Jonesey awoke. His eyes flew open and peered into the gloom of the prison, and he felt the tense, mysterious aura of caution that hangs over a suddenly awakened sleeper. He heard voices. They were just outside on the runway of the tier of cells. And a cell door was being opened.

"Yeh, ain't it a laugh?"

Jonesey was wide awake now. He peered through the wire mesh that separated his cell from the next in line and saw the speaker. And his reportorial brain almost ceased its functions for an instant. The speaker was Tony Garotta, and ushering him into the cell was one of the burly plainclothesmen who had managed the capture of Jonesey.

"Ain't bad," said Tony Garotta, "but how about that smart bum next door?" He was whispering.

"The hell with him! He'll pull no more smart stunts. What difference does it make?"

"None, I guess," said Tony Garotta. "He's sleepin' now."

"He'll need all he can get," said the plainclothesman. "Here."

Jonesey's slitted eyes saw the plainclothesman hand Tony Garotta a small object. Tony chuckled as he put it into his coat pocket.

"In case," said the cop.

Tony nodded.

The cop closed the door on Tony and left. Tony began taking off his clothes. He hung his coat on the back wall of his cell. He walked over to the steel mesh and looked through at Jonesey. He laughed softly to himself. Finally he stripped to his underwear and threw himself on the bunk. In a moment he was snoring.

Jonesey began his speculations again. The jailing of Tony Garotta had been, he knew, an hourly expected thing since the burglaries and robberies during the police parade that afternoon. That was nothing to think about. The department usually went about things in a wholesale manner when public opinion was aroused and clamored, and Tony had a record. Easily, he might be jailed on suspicion, but Jonesey wondered about the manner in which he had been jailed. Certainly, the plainclothesman had not been unfriendly.

He dozed, his mind again a troubled whirl, while Tony Garotta snored in the next cell, and while from the gloom of the prison came the faint sounds of sleeping men. And frequently he awoke and began his speculations over again. He started with his surprising capture and the threat made against him, and followed the events of the night until he came to Tony Garotta again. Jonesey began to smell a rat.

Then once more he was alert. Some one was coming softly down the runway of the tier. The man tiptoed through the murk until his shadow, cast by the feeble glow that came from a dull wall light, fell across the bars of the door in Jonesey's cell. Jonesey saw the man, the same one who had brought Tony Garotta to the cell, pause and peer back in the direction from which he had come. And then Jonesey had to struggle to keep from sitting suddenly upright in his bunk.

The man opened the barred door of Tony Garotta's cell and walked in—and he did not use a key.

He walked softly up to Tony Garotta and shook him. The gang chief groaned and sat up. They whispered, and Jonesey could not quite hear. Tony Garotta got up. He put on his shirt, his trousers and his shoes, followed the cop out the door and vanished down the runway.

Jonesey lay awake for a moment and then he did start up in his bunk. He looked through the wire mesh and saw Tony Garotta's coat and hat hanging on the back wall of the cell. He knew, then, that Tony Garotta would be back, and he knew more. He knew, now, why the police chief was afraid of him. He understood that the danger he was in—heretofore, in spite of conclusions, half doubted—was quite real and that his future must be planned carefully.

For the placing of Tony Garotta in the cell next to him had been a bold and sinister gesture. Jonesey was being ignored; he was considered already as being six feet underground. Already he was out of the way and he was being brutally informed of the fact. But he knew he was not yet out of the way. There yet was Mamie, and Mamie was one of those women who, because she likes a man for no reason at all, will do anything for her man . . .

He waited. In perhaps half an hour or more, Tony Garotta returned. This time he was alone. And he walked into his cell. He closed the door behind him, too, but that was all. He lay down again and soon was snoring.

Jonesey turned over and became comfortable. And this time he slept—soundly. He went to sleep, moreover, with an improved opinion of himself. A man must amount to a great deal when he is wholesomely feared. But fear, he also reflected—fear of this sort—should bear the face of courage and move warily and haughtily, or it would reveal itself. And so it had to Jonesey.

He awoke early, before inspection, and he saw that Tony Garotta had been awake before him. He did not, however, at first, say anything to Tony Garotta. The mob chief was dressed. He was brooding and gazing at the floor, and Jonesey went through the motions of waking up. He groaned and yawned and smacked his lips in the inane fashion of the sleepy. Then, with a tremendous stretch, he sat up abruptly in his bunk and looked around, blinking his eyes.

DAWN was just seeping into the big prison. It crowded out the gloom, but it brought a chill, inspired, probably, because of its eternal cold color, and Jonesey shivered. He pulled his blanket about his shoulders and grimaced at the odor of disinfectant that attacked his nostrils. Then he turned casually to look at the occupant of the next cell.

Tony Garotta was watching him. The gangster's face was stony, but the expression in his eyes was one of malignant satisfaction.

"Well, I be damned," said Jonesey. "Hello, Tony!"

"Hello, Jonesey," said Tony. "What you in for?"

"I ain't Jonesey," said Jonesey. "I'm John Doe. Ever hear o' me?"

"Yeh," said Tony, "I'm personally acquainted with you. I been cell mates with you lots o' times. What you in for, I said?"

"Huntin'."

"Huntin'?"

"Yeh, huntin' without a license."

Tony's broad face wore a puzzled expression.

"What the hell you mean—huntin'?"

"Huntin' a real cop. There ain't any."

"By jeez, Jonesey—" Tony guffawed.

"The name," said Jonesey, "is Doe."

"Mr. Doe," went on Tony. "Tha's hot."

"What you in for, Tony?"

"Suspicion," said Tony, and he watched Jonesey narrowly.

"Suspicion?"

"Yeh."

"Who do you suspect?" asked Jonesey.

"I don't suspect nobody, you damn' fool—I'm suspected."

"Oh," said Jonesey, "I see."

Tony Garotta looked hard at Jonesey. His expression indicated that the first part of his last statement was false; he suspected Jonesey, but he did not know exactly of what.

"Why, Tony," went on Jonesey, "who'd suspect you of anything?"

"Say, guy," said Tony, "don't get wise with me."

"That would be useless," murmured Jonesey; and as Tony began to anger as the words sank in, he went on, "Seen the chief yet?"

Tony started. He grinned maliciously.

"Why should I be seein' that guy?" he asked.

"How should I know?" said Jonesey.

Tony was about to answer, but he heard some one in the runway, approaching the end of the tier. It was the guard and an attendant with breakfast. The guard came to Tony's cell. He took out a key and inserted it, and the key turned. The door, Jonesey realized with rising excitement, had been locked during the night. The hunch he had felt the night before was stronger than ever now.

The attendant set the breakfast inside the cell and moved to Jonesey's.

Tony and Jonesey ate their morning repast in silence. It was just as well, thought Jonesey, for a man needed all his strength to eat the stuff that had been prepared for the prisoners. He finished it, though, and made a mental note that it would make good copy in the story he would write later—if indeed he ever would be able to write it.

"Tony," he asked, when he had finished, "have you a cigaret?"

"Yeah."

Tony moved to his coat which hung on the back wall of the cell. He slapped the coat investigatingly and Jonesey, watching eagerly, noticed, as pressure was applied to the cloth that a hard object was outlined against the left hand pocket. Tony reached into the right hand coat pocket and pulled out a package. He came to the front of the cell and reached through. Jonesey reached through the front of his cell and took the package. He extracted a cigaret and then passed the package back to the gang chief.

"Thanks, Tony," he said.

"O. K," said Tony.

The day advanced. Tony did not leave his cell again during the morning. Noon came and the gangster became drowsy from inactivity. He lay on his bunk and dozed. Several times Jonesey. maddened by the confinement and nothing at all to do, tried to engage Tony in conversation, but the mob chief was too lethargic. He evidently found that talking was an effort.

The monotony was broken for Jonesey when the guard and the attendant approached with lunch. The attendant, he noticed, was an old and little man with a kindly face—a trusty or some one grown old in municipal service. He opened the gang chief's door and set the food inside, but Tony did not notice. Then he moved to Jonesey's cell. The guard opened the door and stepped back.

The old attendant came into Jonesey's cell and set the meal on the bunk. He did it slowly and as he did it he raised his head and looked at Jonesey. Jonesey, watching curiously, started slightly, for the old man was pointing with a thin finger at a tin plate that sat on the battered tray. The look and the gesture were only momentary, and the attendant straightened up. Then he turned and went out of the cell. They walked off down the runway.

Jonesey took up the tray and set it on his knees.

He began to eat. He ate casually and watched Tony Garotta. But Tony Garotta still dozed. Jonesey lifted the tin plate the attendant had indicated, and looked under it. He found a note.

Carefully, watching the drowsing gangster, he opened the note and laid it flat on the tray while he went on eating.

And then he began to laugh. But it was silent, inward laughter.

> I bribed the matron, and she fixed it with this old guy. They'll do anything in this place for money, but you'll have to pay me back. What do you want me to do?
>
> —MAMIE

Jonesey reread the note and considered. He looked at the wire mesh that separated his cell from Tony's and at Tony's coat hanging on the wall at the rear of the cell. And he began to turn over in his mind the things he had covered. Jonesey had been a police reporter for a number of years, and his experience included almost everything concerning police activities. And he thought of cases he had known where prisoners had escaped miraculously and committed seemingly impossible acts. He thought, moreover, of a case in the State penitentiary and he smiled.

He reached into his inside coat pocket and pulled out a pencil stub. He began to write, just as Tony showed signs of waking up. After Mamie's signature Jonesey scribbled hurriedly:

> Get 20 feet of copper wire. Put it in newspaper. Say nothing, yet, to Bill or any one at the office. It'll ruin the story.

He put the note under the plate and set the tray on the floor, just as Tony Garotta sat up and stretched. Tony saw his food and began eating.

"God," he muttered, "this is awful."

"What do you eat it for, Tony?" asked Jonesey.

"I ain't on no hunger strike."

"Sure, but why don't you go out an' get some good stuff, Tony? You don't have to eat that."

The gang chief stopped eating and eyed Jonesey.

"Smart, ain't you?" he said. "But not quite smart enough. Maybe I'll do that, Jonesey—but you won't write nothin' about it."

"Maybe not," said Jonesey.

Tony Garotta said nothing. Jonesey said nothing either, and the gangster finished his meal. He set the tray on the floor. And in a few minutes the guard and attendant came. The attendant took Tony's tray and moved to Jonesey's cell.

"Can you get me a newspaper?" asked Jonesey. "Here." He handed the guard a quarter. "An' some cigarets, too. You can keep this." He slipped the old man a five dollar bill.

The attendant and the guard moved off.

"What you want a newspaper for, Jonesey?" asked Tony. "You ain't gonna scoop nobody." He chuckled.

The attendant returned and brought the newspaper and cigarets. He handed them through the bars of Jonesey's cell, but he held the paper tightly. Jonesey took it and held it just as tightly. He put the cigarets on his bunk and opened the newspaper. Concealed in its pages he felt the coil of copper wire. He slid his hands between the pages and examined it. And he felt a note. Then he looked at Tony Garotta.

The gangster was lying on his bunk, his arms over his face. Jonesey pulled the note out and swiftly hid the wire in the blankets of his bunk. He put the note on the newspaper and read:

> Here's your wire. What have you got in that cell—a radio?
>
> Love,
>
> —MAMIE

He smiled and put the note in his pocket. And then he read the newspaper. It was a *Globe*. The smile grew broader as he read.

He glanced up.

"Here, Tony," he said.

Tony looked sidewise from under his folded arms at Jonesey.

"The chief of police late last night," read Jonesey, "announced that he was holding Tony Garotta, acknowledged head of the Lake Front Gang, and several other known gangsters, for questioning in regard to the burglaries and robberies which occurred during the police parade yesterday. The chief believes Garotta knows who planned and committed these depredations and promises an early solution and significant arrests.

" 'We are working hard on this case,' the chief said, 'and we do not intend to rest until we have broken up the ring of crooks that is preying on the city . . .' "

Jonesey stopped reading aloud as he finished the piece.

"Now ain't he the fair haired boy?" he said, when he had finished. "But I do believe he knows who planned and committed those jobs. Don't you think he knows, Tony?"

Tony grinned.

"Yeh," he said, "I expect he does."

"A smart guy, the chief," said Jonesey, and added in a muttered tone, "but not quite smart enough—"

Tony interrupted—

"What's that?"

"Nothin'."

THE AFTERNOON wore on and the jail grew drowsy. Far down the tier a man hummed tunelessly. Occasionally there came the sound of a soft snore. Things were still and silent and the quiet was broken only now and then by the harsh clamor of the patrol as it drove up below with a prisoner.

With the approach of night, however, the atmosphere of the prison changed. At twilight, the incarcerated men, strange nomads and outcasts, began, like black leopards, to grow restless. They talked. They paced their cells, and Jonesey felt the rising excitement. Night was the period when, free, these men had roamed and ravaged, and now, like beasts in a zoo, they acted still on instinct. It was, Jonesey knew, a temporary thing, a restless emotion that would dash itself out on steel bars, but it served to sharpen his wits.

For now, if Tony Garotta only did what Jonesey expected him to do, Jonesey expected to make his bid.

He waited impatiently for Tony Garotta's next move as the night climbed and the restlessness of the men diminished. And as the night climbed his impatience increased. He looked at his watch and saw by its phosphorescent numerals that it was after ten. And just after he had looked at his watch, the guard came and unlocked Tony's cell. He motioned Tony out and slammed the door.

They moved off down the runway and Jonesey waited. He waited until their steps were faint, and then he reached between the blankets of his bunk and pulled out the copper wire. He uncoiled it swiftly. Then he went to the corner of his cell and calculated the distance between the wire mesh that separated it from Tony's cell and the clothes hook that was on the back wall of his own prison. When he had done this he doubled the strand and redoubled it. Also, he twisted it around itself until he had a fairly rigid affair, which he bent into a hook at the end.

He went, then, to the front of his cell and listened. The great prison was silent, and he moved swiftly to the corner of his cell, where the wire mesh and the back wall met. He slipped the wire through one of the tiny squares and poked it, like a great feeler, toward Tony's coat.

Jonesey, now, was playing his hunch. He could not be sure, of course, but the hunch had grown stronger as the hours had passed and had become almost certainty. The success of the venture, however, demanded extreme patience, and Jonesey set himself.

The wire reached Tony's coat and he pushed the hook into the left hand pocket. He probed carefully and pulled it out. His fishing brought nothing. He repeated the attempt, but still he was unsuccessful. And then he ceased to probe. He pushed the hook into the pocket and pulled it out. With each successive failure, his discouragement grew, until panic began to harass him. He swore.

And then he felt a weight on the end of the wire.

Carefully, now, his calm and patience restored, he pulled the wire out of the pocket and, using the square in the mesh through which it ran as a fulcrum, began moving it as a lever toward the front of Tony's cell. But the weight on the end of the wire suddenly gave way. Jonesey heard a dull clank.

It echoed heavily through the hollow spaces of the jail and Jonesey froze. He waited. But no investigating steps came down the runway, and Jonesey knew that the guard had taken Tony out of the jail and still was with him. Moreover, Jonesey thought he knew where the guard had taken Tony, and that confirmed his hunch.

He looked through the wire mesh and at the floor of Tony's cell where the weight he had fished from Tony's pocket had fallen. He strained his eyes and finally he found it in the gloom. It was a key—the key to Tony's cell—and, Jonesey knew, the master key to every cell in the tier.

Excited and jubilant, he once more pushed the wire through the mesh, and this time it was easier. He could see, and he fished until he found the hole in the handle of the key. This time, however, he had moved up near the front of his cell, and he swung the key toward him, shortening the wire to bring it closer.

It was slow, painfully slow, and Jonesey once more lost his calm. His body was wet with perspiration that started angrily from irritated pores, and he trembled. But he persisted. Four times he moved his position toward the front of Tony's cell and finally he brought the key to the bars that separated the cell from the runway. When he had accomplished this he pulled in on the wire until the key was but a foot from the mesh. Then he withdrew the wire.

He bent it into an arc and reached through the bars which fronted his cell. The wire went around and through the bars that fronted Tony's cell, and Jonesey once more found the key. When he pulled in on the wire this time, he drew the key out into the runway and to a position in front of him.

Jonesey reached through and pulled the key in. He stood up.

He looked at it for a moment and mused. He knew, now, a great many things that before he had only suspected. He knew why Tony had been given the key. Somebody, he thought, was smart, but not smart enough. He considered himself fortunate.

He doubled the wire and put it into his pocket. Then he put on his hat. He listened and then inserted the key in the lock of his cell, bending his wrist through the bars. Cautiously he turned, and the lock grated. He stopped, and then he turned again. The mechanism turned over, and Jonesey pushed the door of his cell open.

He paused again and listened as he peered down the runway. It was deserted and he slipped out and closed the door behind him. He put the key in an inside coat pocket and moved silently down the runway. He passed the cells on tiptoe, glancing in at the sleeping men, and finally he came to the end of the runway, where was the entrance to the bridge of sighs that led to the police station. This he opened with the key and passed through it.

Here he paused again and looked down the cave-like bridge at the door which led to the police station, through which were marched the prisoners after court, and this door, he knew, would be locked. But he did not intend to go through this door. He only listened. No sound came from behind it, and he took to a window in the bridge. The window he opened, and he pulled himself through it.

Clawing, clinging, he pulled himself up until with one hand he could reach the roof. When he had both hands on the roof, he put his feet on the frame of the window pane and pushed downward. He closed the window, and at the same time gave himself leverage with which to strengthen his hold on the roof. He did not look down. One hundred feet below was the brick paved courtyard between the station and the jail.

Jonesey pulled himself up. He grew tired, and his hands weakened. But he pulled desperately and he managed to work his forearms over the edge until they relieved the weight on his hands. He hoisted himself with his forearms and lurched over until his body lay sprawled on the roof. Then caution caused him to roll over farther until he was in the center of the roof, where he lay, trembling and exhausted.

He lay for several minutes, panting, while he breathed deeply of the night air and rested. Above him a giant beacon searched the sky, and from far away, it seemed, came the murmur of the city. The murmur stirred Jonesey and he got to his knees. Then he stood up.

He paused for a moment and listened, as he stooped again, wondering if his scrambling ascent to the roof had been heard. Then, satisfied, he moved along the top of the bridge until he came to the roof of the station. Here he stopped. Three windows away, he knew, was the chief's office, and it was lighted. The window beyond that was lighted also. This was the chief's private office, into which no one was admitted save those on high police business. And those, too, who underwent the ordeal of third degree. This office had been named, by men versed in such matters, the "sweatbox."

NO REPORTER ever was admitted there, but Jonesey had witnessed several of those third degrees. For just below the line of windows was a wide ledge, a concrete coping that ran around the building. The station being an old structure, this coping was wide enough for one or, in an emergency, two men, and on occasions Jonesey had crawled to that ledge and followed it to the window of the sweatbox. There he had seen what is known as a grilling when it is made into a newspaper account.

The grilling incidentally included, if necessary, a length of rubber hose applied viciously across the spine, or perhaps a thousand-candlepower bulb placed an inch from the face, or a vise fastened to tender parts of the anatomy. None of these things left accusing marks, or, if they did, the marks were of the kind that disappear quickly.

Some one was there now, and Jonesey suspected that it was a grilling. But also he suspected that it was a grilling far different from that which usually was carried on.

He put his hand on the stone arch over a dark window and dropped to the ledge. Crawling, he cautiously made his way past the chief's main office and stopped at the edge of the window to the chief's inner office. The window was open.

Jonesey listened.

He had guessed well enough what he would find. His hunch had been correct. For in the sweatbox were Tony Garotta and the chief of police himself. Tony had been called for questioning, but the chief was conducting the questioning alone. He was seated at a table over which hung a light with a green shade, and across from him sat Tony Garotta smoking peacefully.

"Tony," the chief was saying, "it's a pipe. It's the easiest thing yet."

Jonesey shifted to a more comfortable position. The chief went on talking. When he had finished, Tony considered.

"How about the alarms?" asked Tony.

"Don't be dumb," said the chief. "The fuses are dead."

"I ain't got no gun," said Tony.

"You won't need none."

"Maybe not, but if a dumb cop sticks his head in that bank, what do I do then?"

"Ah hell—take this," said the chief.

The chief reached to his hip and pulled a pearl handled revolver from a pocket holster.

"They won't be no dumb cop," said the chief. "He's three blocks away from the bank when you go in an' there's only one watchman. They fired the other today an' I didn't help 'em out with any extra cop. You can clout that watchman. He's old anyway."

Tony nodded. And then his broad face clouded.

"How long," he asked, "do I have to stay in this hoosegow? It ain't so good, you know."

"Tony," said the chief, "it's the swellest place in the world right now. No place safer. You've been arrested. You're in jail. You can't be suspected for nothin'—you got a ironclad alibi. An' ain't I give you the key? Hell, you can slip out, an' I'll see that you can, an' make a date if you want to. But then you can come back, an' here you are, all shut up."

Tony thought that over. Then he shrugged.

"Well," he said, "O. K. You're the boss. How about that smart newspaper boy next to me?"

"Oh, him?" said the chief. "Well, the smart Mr. Jones, alias John Doe, is to be transferred to another jail tomorrow, but for some strange reason he don't get there. He goes for a nice long ride."

All three of them—the chief, Tony Garotta and Jonesey—chuckled.

"Well," said Tony, "I'll go get my stuff."

"No," said the chief, "you won't get your stuff. You're supposed to be undergoin' severe grillin' an' that dumb guard can't know you're not here, see? You'll go like you are, an' you'll be back and undergoin' more grillin' by one-thirty."

Tony shrugged again. They got up.

Jonesey turned and crawled rapidly past the window of the chief's outer office. When he reached the window that opened on a dark office, he raised it and slipped into the building. He tiptoed to the door of this office and peered cautiously into the murky hall. There was no one in sight and he jumped across the hall and began to descend the steps just as he heard the chief and Tony Garotta come out of the chief's office. He ran down the steps, three flights of them, until he came to the entrance of the station. A few loiterers were congregated just outside the door, on the steps. Through them, Jonesey, his hat pulled down, his head lowered, walked and turned up the street. When he reached the first corner he turned and broke into a furious run. He reached the square and burst into the first drug store he came to. He went into a telephone booth.

He dropped his nickel and worked the hook violently.

"Hel-*low*-o-o—"

"Mamie, this is me! I'm out—"

"What did you do with that perfectly ab-*surd* wire, Jonesey? I thought . . ."

"Mamie, you're the dumbest, damnedest girl in this town, but I love you. I . . ."

"Jonesey, you don't love me! I don't believe . . ."

"My Lord! I ain't got time to tell you sweet nothin's. Wrap some clothes around you an' meet me at the corner o' Sixth an' Chester in fifteen minutes. Bring your graphlex; mine's at the office an' I ain't got time to get it. An' if you ain't there in fifteen minutes, I'll beat your scattered brains out."

Jonesey banged up the receiver. He went out of the booth and up to the camera counter of the store. It was one of those drug stores that looks like a warehouse. He bought some flashlight powder and a flash-gun and hurried out of the store. He ran up the street toward his rendezvous with Mamie. And then he stopped and swore at his foolishness. He and Mamie could not pull this thing alone.

HE CHANGED his course and made for the *Globe* office. Probably, after all, he'd have to say something about this to Bill. He hurried down the street that ran along the side of the building. But just as he turned the corner, running full speed, he collided with a big cop who was turning the corner. The cop was much larger than Jonesey and won the tilt. Jonesey sat down hard on the sidewalk.

"Oh," said the cop, " 'scuse me, buddy—but you was in a hurry—an' I didn't see you."

The cop pulled Jonesey to his feet.

"You ain't hurt, are—oh, it's you, you red headed bum!"

Jonesey's dazed wits cleared. He blinked his eyes. He looked at the cop. It was Jake, who wanted a plainclothes job.

"Yeh, Jake," said Jonesey, "it's me. An' I'm sorry I put that picture of you in the paper."

"Yah—" began Jake.

"Jake, you're the finest guy I know, right now. Jake, listen to me! Are you honest?"

"Why, you're damn' right I'm honest. Don't get funny, or I'll bust you."

"Jake," went on Jonesey, "do you want that clothes job?"

Jake looked suspiciously at Jonesey.

"Jonesey," he said, "I ain't gonna fool no more with you. I got removed to this beat because of that picture. Traffic ain't so hot, but it's better'n a night beat downtown. I—"

"Jake, if you do what I tell you, I swear you'll get that clothes job. Why, damn it, Jake, you might even get a looie's job. Hell, Jake, you might even get the chief's job!"

Jake's jaw dropped. Then he waved the affair away.

"Git the hell out o' here. I—"

Jonesey grabbed Jake's tunic.

"Jake—listen—the Union Trust is gonna be stuck up!"

"How do you know that?"

"Damn it, Jake, I *know!* Do you know any men around here; I mean honest men—like you?"

"Well," said Jake, "there's three harness men down at the docks an' they's two clothes at the hotel."

"We'll get 'em."

Jake hesitated.

"Jake," said Jonesey, "so help me, I'm shootin' straight."

"O.K, Jonesey, but I'm warnin' you I'll—"

"Wait, Jake."

Jonesey's eye suddenly had come to rest on an automobile parked at the curb. It was a very familiar automobile. Jonesey looked at his wrist watch. It was a quarter to one. Bill, Jonesey reflected, must be working late. He rushed over to the car and looked at the dash—

"The damn' fool! The swell, damn' fool . . ."

Bill had left the key in the switch again.

"Come on, Jake," said Jonesey.

"My Lord!" said the cop. "Are you swipin' that crate again?"

Jake got in beside Jonesey. Jonesey drove to the docks where they picked up the three uniformed cops. He stopped at the hotel, where Jake got the two plainclothesmen. And then Jonesey drove to Sixth and Chester.

Mamie was waiting there. She looked very cute in a tight cloche and a very short dress. Also, she carried her graphlex.

"Jonesey," she said, when the car rolled up to her, "what *are* you doing with that stupid car again? And why *are* you bringing me out at this absurd hour of the night? You *cer*-tainly are the—"

"Get in!" said Jonesey.

Mamie got in the front seat. She sat on Jake's lap. Jake looked embarrassed. Jonesey drove the car up Sixth and turned into Euclid Avenue. When he reached the bank he drove past it and then slipped into an alley that led past the rear entrance. He drove past this entrance until he was half a block or more from it, and then he stopped. They got out and Jonesey darkened the car. Then they hurried back to the entrance.

"Jonesey," began Mamie, "I think this is *too* silly for words. I—"

"Jonesey," said Jake, "if you're givin' me another sleigh ride, I'll—"

"My Lord!" said one of the plainclothesmen. "Is that Jonesey?"

Jonesey paid no attention. He was ringing the watchman's bell.

"Jake," he said, "you get by the door. I want that old man to see a uniform when he comes. We ain't got much time."

Jonesey's voice was strained. It came in the clipped words of agitation, and the rest of the group grew tense. Mamie looked at Jonesey and inspected her camera. The cops glanced furtively up and down the alley.

"God!" said Jonesey. "Won't he ever come? We've—"

He stopped as a shaft of light from within the bank shot out and hit Jake in the face. The door swung open.

"What'sa trouble?"

It was the old watchman. He swung the light around the group. He was puzzled by Mamie and the men in civilian clothes, but the uniforms of the policemen were reassuring. Jonesey explained.

"How do you know that?" asked the watchman.

"Hell!" said Jonesey. "I'll write a letter in the mornin'. Come on!"

They entered the bank and closed the door.

"You," said Jonesey to the watchman, "get behind that, there." He pointed to a desk a few feet from the door. "There'll be a lookout, sure, an' you keep him covered. An' switch the lights on when the works begin."

The old man looked at Jake.

"Go ahead," said Jake. "I think this red headed goof knows somethin' this time."

The watchman went over to the desk and sank from sight behind it.

"Thanks, Jake," said Jonesey.

* * *

THE Union Trust Company was on the busiest corner in The Town. It was the oldest and most influential financial institution in the State and was housed in a venerable building which had been its trade mark for years. It was built in the form of an L. Coming in the front entrance from the avenue, one walked straight ahead until he came to an angle. Directly ahead was the rear door, leading to the alley. Here, at this angle, one turned to the right and walked down another wing, which was a wide concourse, surrounded by the cages of the tellers. And down this wing Jonesey led the six cops and Mamie, until he came to a door in the line of cages. They went through the door.

"There's the vault," said Jonesey. "Each of you guys get in one of these cages. Three on each side. Mamie'n I'll take the middle one."

The cops moved to their places. Each entered a cage. Jonesey and Mamie went into the one directly opposite the ponderous circular door of the vault. In each of the three on either side of them was a cop.

They sat down to wait.

The late noises of the avenue, muffled and hollow, came faintly to their ears. The strange night sounds of the great expanse of the bank echoed mysteriously. Somewhere a clock ticked inexorably. Its ticking grew louder as the seconds passed, and Jonesey heard a cop shift. The man's motion was repeated down the line and again there was only the ghostly stillness of the bank.

Minutes passed.

"For Pete's sake," began a cop, "this—"

His whisper was cut short by a long hiss from Jonesey. For Jonesey had heard something. From the door through which they had entered came a faint, rasping noise. The noise was that of wood and metal straining under heavy pressure. It continued and the strain grew greater, and as it increased sweat started on Jonesey's forehead. His whole body drew taut as the wood and metal groaned. The noise did not drown out completely the measured sound of the ticking clock, which beat a relentless tempo to the straining monotony. The strain increased and then abruptly ceased in a rattle. The door had given way. Jonesey dug his nails into his palms.

There was silence, then. Silence except for the clock, its ticks louder than ever now. They seemed like a ringing gong to Jonesey. And then the silence was broken. Feet were slurring softly over the stone floor of the bank and coming nearer. They moved swiftly down the concourse to the door through which Jonesey and the rest had entered. And Jonesey, looking cautiously over the counter of the cage in which he crouched, could see three heads. They moved through the door and to the rear of the cages, where a flashlight suddenly shone. It darted about, searching the surface of the circular door to the vault, and came to rest on the locking mechanism. And just outside its reflection Jonesey could see the dimly outlined figure of Tony Garotta.

He touched Mamie. Mamie already had her camera open. And Jonesey held the flashlight gun loaded and ready in his hand. He kept a tight grip on Mamie's arm.

Tony was whispering to the two men with him. They handed him things. He set something on the floor, and Jonesey could see, in the skirts of the flashlight, the chief's pearl handled revolver. He chuckled to himself, despite the terrible turmoil raging within him, and made ready.

Tony began to work. Around him, now, Jonesey could see the tools and near them the receptacle that held the nitroglycerin. Tony and his men were working silently and swiftly.

Tony held out his hand.

"Now!" he whispered.

One of the men reached for the can of nitroglycerin. Jonesey released his grip on Mamie's arm and gave her a slight push. He pulled the trigger of his flashlight gun. The powder went off in a soft, puffing explosion.

For an instant the cathedral-like bank was weirdly illuminated, revealing, before the vault door, Tony and his two helpers, motionless in fright and surprise, and in that instant Mamie held her camera expertly.

The acrid fumes of thick powder smoke filled the bank.

"Up with 'em!"

It was Jake who had yelled. He was answered by a long, orange spray and a roar from the gun of one of Tony's helpers. From the door that led to the alley came the roaring noise of automatics. The watchman and the lookout had opened on each other. The shots thundered in the hollow expanse of the bank and then the other cops opened fire.

Jonesey and Mamie ducked. But as they ducked, Jonesey saw the figure of Tony Garotta dive forward to the door leading through the line of cages. Jonesey yelled and some one shot in Tony's direction. But it was impossible to see in the gloom. The watchman had failed to set the lights.

Before the vault door, now, the battle was over. Flashlights shone on the door by which Tony's two colleagues lay, their bodies bleeding from a dozen wounds. Jake turned them over. He exclaimed—

"A'mighty—"

Jonesey looked.

"Yeah," he said, "I knew that."

The figures were those of two of the plainclothesmen who had kidnapped Jonesey. Jonesey reached down and picked up the chief's pearl handled revolver.

"Come on!" he said. "This ain't over. You—" he indicated a uniformed cop—"stick here. Tony's on the lam, but he ain't goin' far."

"Gees," said Jake, "I forgot Tony."

They ran out the door in the line of cages and up the bank to the door leading to the alley. They paused there for a moment. The watchman lay slumped across the desk behind which he had hidden, and he was moaning. In front of the desk, pitched forward on his face, sprawled Tony's lookout. They turned him over.

"God!" said Jake.

It was another of the plainclothesmen who had kidnapped Jonesey. He had been shot squarely between the eyes.

"Come on!" said Jonesey.

He grabbed Mamie and rushed out the door. Jake and the four other cops followed him. They ran up the alley. Jonesey stuffed Mamie into the front seat of Bill's car. The cops piled in the rear seat. He took off furiously and hurtled into the street. When he came to the avenue, he turned west, toward the Public Square and the very heart of The Town.

"Where you goin'?" asked Jake.

"To the station," said Jonesey.

"To the sta—look out!" Jonesey had turned a corner on two wheels.

"Yeah."

"Let him have his way, Jake," said Mamie. "You can't do a *thing* with him—"

JONESEY turned into the street on which the station fronted and opened the throttle wide. He pulled up in front of the station a minute later. Before the car had stopped he was out. He had halted directly behind another car. He laid his hand on its hood.

"That's his," he said. "Still warm. Come on!"

They hurried up the steps and into the station. But Jonesey did not stop there. His hand gripping Mamie's patient arm, he went on up, followed by Jake and the other cops. When they reached the bottom of the third flight he paused.

"Quiet!" he said, and hurried on.

They reached the third floor corridor and he motioned the cops to him.

"Stand outside the chief's door," he said.

"The chief!" That was Jake.

"The chief!" said Jonesey. "Keep him in his office—"

The cops moved to the door of the chief's outer office.

"No," said Jonesey, "the sweatbox."

They moved up one door and stood. Jonesey entered the office through which he had escaped earlier in the evening. Still holding Mamie's arm, he went to the window. He motioned her out.

"Jonesey," she whispered, "have you lost your mind? I will *not* be a party to a love suicide."

Jonesey shoved her through the window to the wide ledge. He followed her. He pushed her along until they came to the edge of the window to the chief's inner office. There he stopped her and they crouched to listen.

Within were the chief and Tony Garotta. But now the chief had been joined by two inspectors and a captain of detectives. They were grilling Tony Garotta. They were questioning him on the burglaries and robberies committed the day before during the police parade. And Tony seemed out of breath as they questioned him. Perspiration hung in sticky beads on his forehead. Frequently he flung it away with his hand.

The chief was doing most of the grilling. But suddenly the captain of detectives broke in:

"What the hell's wrong with you?" he asked Tony Garotta. "You look like you'd just run a race. Did you get tired comin' from that cell?"

Jonesey, peering around the window, saw Tony look fearfully at the chief. But the chief fixed him with a threatening glare. Tony mopped his forehead again.

"No," he said, "nothin's wrong with me."

"Oh, no?"

Every man in the chief's office turned. Jonesey had said that. Tony and the chief started from their chairs. The others stood motionless, their gazes glued to the window.

"Tony," said Jonesey, "I got a picture of you tryin' to crack the Union Trust safe—"

Tony's face twisted in panic. He looked wildly at the chief. But the chief gave him no comfort. The chief was, in that moment, pulling his last big bluff.

"He planned it!" screamed Tony. He was pointing at the chief. "He planned it! It's his job!"

The chief did not move. He still glared at Tony Garotta.

"He's cuckoo—" began the chief.

"Maybe," said Jonesey, "but he had your gun when he was crackin' the safe. It's in the picture—" Jonesey paused—"an' here it is!"

He stood up on the ledge and held it before the astounded eyes of the inspectors and the captain of detectives.

The chief bolted. He rushed to the door that led to the hall. The inspectors and the captain of detectives made no move. They were immobile in their amazement. Tony might have moved, but the muzzle of the chief's revolver menaced him.

The chief reached the doorway. He pulled it open, and as he pulled it open he ran into the arms of Jake and the other cops.

"Now!" said Jonesey.

Mamie stood up. Jonesey pulled the trigger of his flashlight gun. For an instant the courtyard between the station and the jail was ablaze and in that instant Mamie again snapped her camera expertly. But Mamie had, also, in standing up, crowded Jonesey. He slipped and fell.

Mamie shrieked.

"Oh, my God!" she screamed. "He's gone an' killed himself!"

"Stop yellin'!"

That was Jonesey. He was clinging to the ledge with his forearms.

"Help me up!"

Mamie pulled him up.

Inside, the captain of detectives and the inspectors, along with Jake and the other cops, had the chief and Tony. Tony was sobbing and cursing, blurting out the amazing story of the chief's crookedness, while the chief swore and denied. Jonesey waited, while Tony's recital went on, and he took out his pencil. He even took a few notes.

Abruptly he broke into Tony's conversation. He threw the revolver, which he had dropped to the ledge when he set off the flashlight gun, on the table. Beside it he placed the key he had fished out of Tony Garotta's pocket.

"You can have those," he said to the police, "as Exhibits A and B. I'll tell more about that key later."

He turned to the chief and Tony. He looked from one to the other for a moment and then he laughed.

"Smart," he said. "An' smart enough. Come on, Mamie."

Mamie followed him out the door. They went down to the entrance.

"Did you hurt yourself in that fall, Jonesey?" asked Mamie.

Jonesey shook his head.

"Jonesey," she went on, "you are the most ab-*surd* person."

Jonesey stopped as he was about to get into Bill's car and kissed her.

They drove off. Jonesey drove to the *Globe.*

"Come on up, Mamie," he said as they stopped.

Mamie followed him to the freight elevator door. It slammed open.

The old operator was there, staring at them.

"For the—" began the old man.

"I been huntin' again, Dad, an this time I found a real cop."

The old man looked puzzled.

"The boss," he said, "is on his ear again, he's that sore—says you're the biggest bum—"

"I'm goin' up," said Jonesey.

They went up. They went down the hall and through the door that opened into the city room.

"Wait here, Mamie," said Jonesey, and sat her down on a bench outside the railing that kept visitors from the editorial sanctum.

He walked over to his desk, through the clattering confusion of typewriters, and opened it. He inserted a sheet of paper in his typewriter and began to beat violently.

"Boy!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

A boy approached. Jonesey gave him the films. The boy took them away to have them developed.

"You bum!"

Jonesey did not look up, but he knew Bill was there.

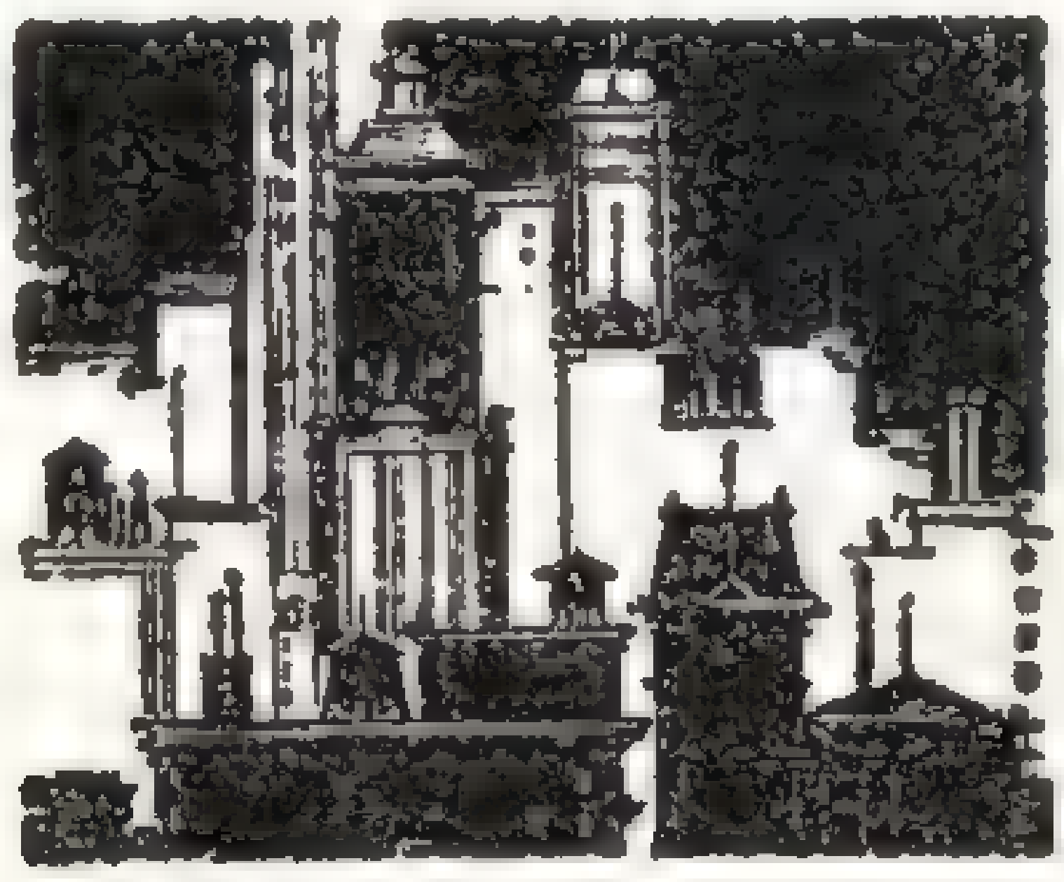
"Sure," said Jonesey. "You can relax now, Bill. This will make the final like you wanted—"

"Aw, hell!"

Bill started back to his desk.

"You can't do a *thing* with him, can you?"

That was Mamie.



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AN INTERESTING note from a reader about explosive freight.

New York, N. Y.

In the Nov. 15th issue, "Hell Quenchers" by Foster Harris, there is mention of 240 quarts of nitroglycerine in a truck tearing down a road and barely missing another machine. That caused a little smile. I don't know how powerful or touchy nitro is and don't know much about TNT, but I do know that it is right potent.

What made me smile was comparison of the amount of nitro that the truck carried and the cargo that a ship I was on held. We, the U. S. S. *Roanoke* in the Northern Mine Barrage, carried 860 mines and each mine was loaded with 300 pounds of TNT. There were four ships of that capacity and six unit lesser.

I often wondered what might have happened if an enemy cruiser, cute six-inch shell or a torpedo, had hit us. You couldn't just get off and run.

This isn't meant to belittle the ride on that truck, as I wouldn't want to be near when it hit something. I thought you might be interested to know about that cargo. —HOWARD A. METCALFE

Obviously, Comrade Metcalfe's smile was justified. Foster-Harris, to whom we passed on the letter, discovered he hadn't said the last word on the subject in his story—and we don't find his style tiring in the least:

Fort Worth, Texas

Camp-Fire passes your letter on to me for comment. I gather you are firing no shells in my direction (for which restraint, thanks). Perhaps I can add a little of the background stuff to that "Hell Quenchers" yarn which may be interesting.

I don't pretend to be any authority on explosives, but it is my firm conviction that nitroglycerin is *by far* the most treacherous and deadly explosive in commercial or military use. There may be deadlier laboratory products, don't know about that, but for plain, downright, instant death and destruction you'll have to look a long way to beat liquid nitro.

Just to give an idea of its power, the "Explosives Handbook" cites results of a test made in a Stockholm granite quarry. Five pounds of nitroglycerin detonated in a 10-foot bore hole tore away 200 cubic yards of solid granite, 350 tons, and also fissured the main rock for long distances in all directions.

By the way, here's another that should be interesting. A shipload of nitroglycerin did explode once, in Colon harbor, Panama. It wrecked practically every ship in the harbor and darn near dug the Panama Canal in an instant or something like that.

Now for some oilfield stuff. Maybe it will interest you to know that the double nitro shell catching stunt used as an incident in "Hell Quenchers" was related by a famous shooter as an actual personal experience. I twisted it around some to suit my story of course—the yarn is all fiction—but it was based on fact.

Also the cratered gasser, shooting it out, and the rescue stunt likewise were based on actual facts. The real incident wasn't anywhere near as dramatic as my fictional episode—we yarn spinners gotta be allowed some license—but the editors will recall that I enclosed some photographs of that burning well and the rescue in progress, when I sent in the story.

GETTING back to the nitroglycerin subject, any one acquainted with oilfields will verify the fact that nitro is transported about more or less as I have it. What's more, nitro laden trucks have actually been in almost every kind of traffic accident you can imagine, including turning clear over, without exploding.

Maybe I shouldn't expose that; sort of spoils the effect of having a fictional gent just miss a truck with a soup wagon. Just the same I'd sure hate to be on either truck, whether the shooters claim it's perfectly safe or not. I don't know just how heavy a blow it takes to detonate nitro. One shooter told me it took a direct blow of only about 30 pounds, another said it took more. But I do know it takes only about 400 degrees of heat—a nice spurt of gasoline fed flame for instance would be simply wonderful.

The present nitro trucks use what is called a "safety box" to contain the soup—a heavy, wooden affair, firmly bolted on the chassis. The thing is lined with copper, a sort of pan or dish to catch any possible leakage; and in addition each 10-quart can is placed in a rubber boot or sheath. A sort of egg crate framework separates the individual cans, with thick rubber padding beneath and heavy felt above, the safety box lid clamping down tightly.

As to shots, they run anywhere from a few quarts up to a thousand quarts or more. The very largest single shot I ever heard of was one used by an oil operator friend of mine with headquarters here in Fort Worth. He bumped one of his refractory tests with 2,000 quarts (which figures up to about three and one-half tons, so they said). What it did to the strata 3,300 feet down nobody can say but I imagine it did plenty.

You'd think a big shot like that would shake the earth. Actually it sounds like a firecracker going off in a can, a little firecracker in a can a hundred feet away, at that. Up on the surface, though—well that would be some different! Among other illustrations as to the playfulness of nitro going boom on the surface, I recall the yarn about the shooter who was somewhere in the vicinity of a nitro magazine when it went off. They thought they were doing quite well when they found one ear to bury.

—FOSTER-HARRIS

* * *

A NOTE from Hugh Pendexter giving some of the background against which he built his novelette in this issue, "Shane Goes Riding".

Norway, Maine

The story was suggested by the Reynolds' map, which doubtless has led hundreds to seek for the bandit treasure which surely was concealed in the locale featured by my story. Very possibly the money and dust have been found, the finder keeping silent. But there is no record of the fact. Major-General John W. Cook, for thirty-five years chief of the Rocky Mountain Detective Association, has vouched for many of the facts I used.

James Reynolds was ambitious to emulate Quantrell's sacking of Lawrence by sacking Denver. He led his guerillas up from Texas after quitting his command of irregulars under the Confederate flag in 1864. The majority of his men being Texans, there were but twenty-two willing to ride north with him in April. His brother John was of the party. He expected to get many recruits in the mines, as many Southern sympathizers were among the gold hunters. He failed to secure even one. They made for the Spanish Peaks, and were forced to subsist on their pack-animals until they hit the old Santa Fé trail.

They were attacked by a large band of Indians and whipped them easily. They captured a Mexican train and secured $40,000 in currency, $6,000 in drafts, and $2,000 in coin. Also they amply helped themselves to arms, ammunition, provisions and mules.

Strangely enough, outfitted as they had been, dissension arose. This was largely because Reynolds took possession of most of the money. Eight men stuck by the leader, logically considering he should carry the surplus with which to outfit recruits. The discontented returned to Texas. Those who pushed on were: James and John Reynolds, Jack Robinson, Tom Knight, Owen Singletary, John Babbitt, Jake Stowe, John Andres, Tom Halliman. Some of these names may have been assumed.

They planned to go up the Arkansas from Pueblo and into the rich mining districts of South Park. Much of their plunder was cached, such as extra guns, ammunition and silver coin. They went into camp where Cañon City now stands. From a trader named Bradley, Reynolds had his men buy clothing, provisions and whisky. They next camped on Current Creek.

They decided to make California Gulch (Leadville) and after inspecting these diggings and sounding prospects for the Denver raid, they voted to try the Buckskin and Mosquito camps. They entered South Park below Fairplay, and put up at Guireaud's ranch, with whom Reynolds seemed to be acquainted. He wrote several letters to friends in Fairplay while there. He learned from the rancher the time the next coach left Buckskin. Then he set out for McLaughlin's ranch to mail his letters. There they captured McLaughlin and Major Demere and took the former's fine saddle horse.

When the coach pulled in, Reynolds emerged from the house and held up Abe Williamson, driver, and Billy McClelland, the superintendent. The driver had but fifteen cents and they took it. The superintendent panned out $400. McClelland furnished the key to the express box when Halliman was about to use an ax. This yielded $6,000 in dust and $2,000 in gold amalgam, it being the first taken from John W. Smith's Orphan Boy Mine as well as being the first run of the stamp mill in Mosquito Gulch. Halliman butchered the mail-bags with his dirk. The haul was $10,000, below the average amount carried. The coach was destroyed.

The band started for the Michigan ranch to secure the stage stock. McClelland, on a mule, trailed them through Hamilton, Tarryall and Fairplay, spreading the news and getting recruits. The roundup and capture and massacre is related in the story just about as it happened. Van Pelt was killed at Alamosa as I have described.

—HUGH PENDEXTER

* * *

ALL of you old-timers have heard this shark discussion done mos' to death. Somebody throws down the glove, and before we know it we're at it again. Comrade Rogalsky comes so well documented, it would seem there was no chance for further argument. But I'll wager we've not heard the last of it.

Blue Mountains, N. S. W, Australia

I am an old "Adventurite" and take the liberty of writing. I note that Max H. Carson says in his learned diatribe that "maybe sharks bite at Aden or Sydney, etc."

Sharks *do* bite at Sydney, and in proof thereof I enclose a cutting from a Sydney evening newspaper of an inquest on a poor lad who was killed by a shark. Also other cuttings re other sharks.

We have the most glorious beaches in the world—golden sands and wonderful surf—but sharks are always a danger, and every beach now has a beach Shark bell lookout tower. One beach, "Coogee," has a shark-proof net, running from a long pier (pleasure) jutting out into the Pacific to the end of the beach, where thousands bathe in safety.

In the last four or five years we have had many tragedies. Most people die, but there are some maimed who live. I know of one young girl had both her legs bitten off, fifteen yards from the beach in four feet of water. Also a young fellow whose arm was bitten off, and whose brother held on to the other arm and kicked and fought the monster off.

There are innumerable instances, and sharks here are a real menace. Max H. Carson can take it from me that sharks *do* bite.—D. W. ROGALSKY

Limited as we are in space, I shall have to let one of the cuttings suffice. This one is from the Sidney *Herald:*

Seven large sharks, which were speeding towards surfers at Maroubra Bay on Saturday, were detected by Mr. D. Clarke, the pilot of an aeroplane which was flying over the bay. Mr. Clarke did his best to warn bathers, but as his signals were not interpreted correctly, he flew back to Mascot, and from there telephoned to club officials.

Mr. Frank Bardsley, the owner of the 'plane, observed nine sharks when the aeroplane returned to Maroubra Bay, and later, another was detected. Two were between the surf boat in the breakers, and swimmers. Fortunately, by this time, all were able to take advantage of the warning from the air.

* * *

IF LOUIS LACY STEVENSON made a slip in his story, "Venable's Kid", it got by us here in the office as well. We can only offer the same apology that he does—that we're by no means as familiar with bonds and other securities as we'd like to be. And that's sincere, any way you take it.

New York, N. Y.

May I call to your attention what might be a slip-up in Louis Lacy Stevenson's story, "Venable's Kid"?

Venable intended that when there was about two million dollars in cash and negotiable securities in the vault, his son should steal same. Quoting Venable: "You could come in, get the boodle, and go out again, without being seen."

Now I was a security clerk in a banking and brokerage house on the Street for about ten years. Suppose of the two million dollar $200,000 was cash, the remainder bonds (Venable did a bond business). That would be a big percentage in cash; leaving $1,800,000 in bonds. Bonds are usually issued in $1,000 pieces. Just visage Venable's son carrying away hurriedly 1800 bonds. How large a bundle do you think this would make, and how much do you think it would weigh? Ask Mr. Stevenson this.

—MELVIN GUTMAN

Mr. Stevenson's answer follows:

Right at the outset, I'll confess that I am not as familiar with bonds and other securities as I would like to be. So, before writing my story, I talked with a young man who has been a Wall Street messenger for some time. He told me that on occasions, he had carried a million dollars' worth of securities in a case thrust under his vest and believed that he could carry two million that way but that it would be difficult because of the bulk. Then I talked with the bond inspector in a large Wall Street house. He said he could carry $2,000,000 without trouble if he had a grip or a suitcase, even if the denominations were $1,000 each. He added, however, that if the bonds had a great many coupons, it would be difficut. His estimate of the weight of such a load was from 25 to 50 pounds.

Then too, I had in mind a banker friend whom I met in the Biltmore one day. He was fighting off bellboys who were reaching for his grip. "I can't let them take it," he told me when he had freed himself. "I've got three-quarters of a million in negotiable securities in that grip." It wasn't a large grip.

Because of the inquiries mentioned, also the Biltmore incident, I developed the situation in my story. As you will remember, I carefully laid in the fact that it was an old building and that there was no watchman. Any person, unless he acted suspiciously, could walk along the streets of Detroit at 2 o'clock in the morning carrying a grip without being questioned.

In the foregoing, I omitted to state that I learned that Liberty bonds were issued in demoninations as high as $100,000 but that the higher denominations couldn't be negotiated. So I abandoned any thought of those.

As I have always taken pride in being as accurate as possible, I hope that my information has not been incorrect. —LOUIS LACY STEVENSON

* * *

THIS reader tells of a jungle mystery that is not the less provocative for being fact instead of fiction:

Baltimore, Md.

With reference to "Owl Eyes" by Arthur O. Friel, some years ago we were floating down the Guaviare River, not the Rio Jutahy, on our return from a survey of the transportation possibilities in view of developing the rubber industry in that country.

Within a few miles of the Rio Orinoco, the Guaviare being one of the tributaries of this great river, we noticed some rubber trees cut. From a closer view we realized that it must have been years since rubber was gathered in the vicinity, yet with difficulty we made landing. The banks were thick with tropical foliage. Grabbing jungle creepers and pulling ourselves through the dense undergrowth in the general direction of those rubber trees, within a short distance from the river we came to a mass of débris that once must have been a hut. The roof of palm leaves, in a very much decayed condition and once probably supported by a number of posts, was on the ground covering quite an area. A few pieces of protruding timber, that looked like having been cut by a saw, aroused our curiosity to an extent that after getting some tools from our boats, we began to clear away the rotten leaves and branches over a foot thick.

First the remains of some tin utensils were found, later the barrel of a very rusty gun, than a few scattered bones, and near what must have been a hammock, a skull and other human bones. We located over twenty rifles of every description, ammunition, a large quantity of clothing of which the buttons could only be handled. A heavy silver watch chain with a medallion, a French sounding name engraved on it, was carried with us, also the skull, at our departure.

Months later I returned with Father José to this place. He was a missionary at San Ferñando, in Venezuelan territory, and had spent most of his life along the different rivers in the upper Orinoco region. His only complaint was that he could not persuade the natives to wear clothes. He could not remember a thing that would reflect on our find, and was of the opinion that the skull was of a white man's. The Indians in this part of the country are always wandering, for when one of them dies, the whole tribe leaves the bad spot. It is the custom, and so information from Indians at that time in the vicinity was of no value.

The skull was brought to Washington, where experts confirmed the opinion that it was a white man's; the watch with the medallion and name engraved on it is in Edinburgh, at present in the possession of R. E. McDonald, a member of our party, who spent considerable time trying to locate some one who knew a man by that French sounding name, a man who went up the Orinoco River never to come back. —P. MARSCHAL

* * *

ONE of you wanted to know about turkey calls. For the following information we are indebted to some one who prefaces his letter with, "Here goes another two-cent stamp in the interests of *Adventure*, which is the best of a bad lot as far as Western stuff goes, from cows to turkeys," and signs it, "Tonto". This sounds a little like a backhanded compliment, but let's accept it, anyway, and thank him for helping us out.

Re turkey calls:

Take an old pipe, suck on its stem, leaving a little air space, put your hand over the bowl off and on, with a waver low to crescendo and back—a liquid, penetrating *pt-pt-pt*—and you have the turkey gathering call. However, without hearing and knowing turkey, it's like the scarecrow in the corn field—as compared to a man, and don't fool any turkey.

A "gobble" is a warning note, and don't bring any wild turkey to you. Wild turkey don't gobble much, but they keep up a constant *pt-pt* feeding, and they travel as they feed.

A turkey call is sometimes made from the second wing bone of any turkey, wild or tame, smoothed off below the joint; and it takes practise, first to know the *pt-pt* call and then to do it, as in anything.

There is no difference in bronze turkeys, wild or tame, as the big turkey ranches get wild toms, because they are more immune to disease, and breed flocks. It's the same turkey the Pilgrim hunters ate for dinner, the same that were the only domestic animal of the prehistoric cave dwellers.

Now it was no trick in the days of John Alden to kill a wild turkey, nor in the days of Jim Bridger, or today, for as in hunting any animal, you must know their habits, their food and their habitat.

Mr. Lee, I forget your Hillsboro country, but you just scout around for some pine trees on the sides or edge of a canyon where you have seen your turkey, until you see droppings and a few feathers. Then get yourself a bush just around daylight (for they leave their roost at dawn) and keep still; or if you prefer, try it around an hour before dark. You will have more fun watching than you will ever having killing them. My idea about wild turkey is meat and a change of diet, and I prefer when needing a wild turkey, to drop around a roost, with a .22 rifle, and pick off a gobbler, and go home, rather than batting into a flock, shooting a lot, crippling more than you get, and scaring the rest into spasms.

I could tell you a lot about wild turkey but you can have more fun finding it out for yourself.

* * *

MR. THORNE, who writes this letter on disarming a man of a gun or knife, was formerly wrestling instructor at the University of Michigan. He gets his authority to speak from actual practise.

Detroit, Michigan

Was much interested in an article on how to disarm a gunman. This was published some time ago in Camp-Fire. One writer told how easy it was to avoid being plugged, through use of certain holds; the other, an expert in firearms, denied such tactics would work. In my opinion, both were right and both were wrong. To digress a little here; got my authority from actual practise, some fifteen years of professional wrestling of all styles, from catch-as-catch-can, judo or ju-jutsu, to back-holds, which last I used among the Arkansas hillbillies and Kentucky mountaineers. Catch-as-catch-can wrestling is almost unknown among the hillmen of these States and is called "just wollering around."

The writer who told how to disarm a gunman is away off his method. Any judo expert, police instructor or wrestler would laugh at his tactics. The gun of an opponent should be jerked sideways, never up or down. Common mathematics shows this the only proper method, whether against gun or knife, Jerking a weapon up or down, it has to clear the entire length of your body to place you in safety, while but a few inches of a side twist or push will clear yourself.

Space will not permit me to tell of the many different leverage grips that can be used. These grips are absolutely workable safety-guards—if you are quick, strong and determined, and if you have an opening to apply them.

In spite of the gun experts' denial, these holds can be, and are, used successfully. Should a gunman expect such tactics he could easily prevent them, but it would be a sole question of *timing*, *quickness* and *openings*. Both men would have an ace in the hole, with the odds, however, on the holder of the gun or knife. The user of twisting or pushing grips would have a tremendous leverage of both hands against his opponent's one.

I could draw most holds, but knowing space limitations, will close saying I hope no reader puts either theory to a test. One might have a broken arm or wrist and the other a leaky midsection.

—CLIFFORD THORNE

* * *

MORE in regard to that noisy transmitter in Ared White's story, "The House in Rue Carnot".

Berwyn, Ill.

Comrade Kruse's remarks about Brother White's radio set makes me agree with Brother White, if anybody cares. Having had experience with radio since its inception, I can verify the fact that it took a whole band and a platoon of a soup drinkers to hush the noise of a spark gap transmitter. There was no system of compass detection during the war, but which they mean the loop, directional method of finding an illicit transmitter. The loop is a post-War antenna.

Mr. White states that radio outfits caused much difficulty by sending messages in the clear, sometimes giving their location by map coordinates which enabled enemy artillery to open up on them. Of course, being spark gap sets. To explain it simply, a spark gap set is nothing but a big harmonic or a large electrical disturbance that has no wave length or kilocycle designation and is heard throughout the broadcast band regardless of what capacity the tuning condensers are set at. Mr. White called it buzzing, for the lack of the right word, I reckon. You could call it a buzz; an amplified buzz. Comrade Kruse designed a mighty fine short wave set—I have one, on which I have heard many parts of the world. Comrade Kruse knows his radio, but I wonder if he ever heard a Superflex of the vintage of 1921? Two variometers and a 1250 turn honeycomb coil, and talk about the loud buzzings of Mr. White's transmitter, he ought to hear the Superflex receive 'em. With one stage of audio, the station came in like a troupe of banshees whistling as though they were all suffering from a stomach ache and could be heard over into the next county. Comrade Kruse ain't heard no noise until he hears a Superflex.

I would even be pleased to send him a hookup, if he would like to have some fun and scare all his West Hartford, Conn., neighbors into climbing telephone poles.

YEA, verily! Often a scrivener has a hard time to put over—make understandable—something in the fewest possible number of words. And if he does go to any length to illustrate it thoroughly—makes it air tight and understandable to even the person who does not understand the subject under discussion (not saying that Comrade Kruse doesn't know his radio kumquats. He does, and how!) but, in a story, as in military tactics, the idea is to reach your objective in the least number of words and the shortest reading time. Start some long winded explanation, even for the sake of clearness and veracity, and somebody snaps that it is irrelevant and jams a blue pencil through it. So you just say a thing is so, because you know it's so, and let it go at that. And then some reader climbs your frame and asks how come.

You remember the U. S. mail boat in New York harbor, with the spark gap set, and all the broadcast listeners were taking up a collection to buy Uncle Samivel—Lost-His-Shirt Samivel—an up-to-snuff transmitter for his blank dashed mail boat? With its disturbing pre-War spark gap yammering transmitter that spoiled every one's reception? Hell's bells, I even picked it up out here, eight miles west of Chicago's State Street.

Well, anyway, I'm glad Comrade Kruse reads our book and I take my hat off to him as a radio designer. Still, when a radio designer pulls a fox paw, the guy that buys a kit of parts to the supersomething, coast-to-coast reception on one tube, ain't got much chance for a snappy comeback after he wires it together. As for making incredible statements, Barnum was a rank amateur alongside of the ballyhooers for the radio trade. And by that I don't mean Comrade Kruse. He's one man in whose statements I put faith. But poets and radio press agents are given license, so give the fiction writers a break. It's better if the fiction trigger puller can do supernatural things, such as fanning an elephant gun off the hip, without it kicking him in the stomach. That shows that he is a strong man. And the author doesn't have to explain the fact in 100 additional words. Everybody profits, including the cashier.

—FRANK SCHINDLER

It certainly is a brave plea that Comrade Schindler makes in behalf of his brother authors. But what if he's met with the challenge that writers are already being extended more license than is good for them? Else how account for the enormous bulk of fiction, of the very kind he satirizes in his letter, that is so avidly consumed by large sections of the American public? As for *Adventure*, I guess we'll just have to cleave as closely as possible to authenticity of detail, as we always have in the past, even if it does involve the cashier for extra wordage. So please don't inhibit yourself too strenuously in your next tale, Comrade Schindler!

* * *

IT IS with some trepidation I print this piece by Gordon MacCreagh, in connection with his complete novel in this issue. He touches on two questions which are as heavily loaded with shock power as the cargo of Comrade Metcalfe's ship, previously mentioned at this meeting. But I know Mr. MacCreagh swings a mighty controversial cudgel. And I know he's willing, nay eager, to meet all comers. So here goes:

New York City

Lest some horrified person exclaim that slavery was abolished some sixty-five years ago, let me assure him that slaves are being captured right now along the Anglo-Italo-Abyssinian border and are being shipped to Southern Arabia just as described in the story via the Baia del Negro in the same foul old *dhows* of Capt. Marryatt's time. In Hadramaut a female slave is worth $250 and a strong male in good condition, $200. Furthermore, white female slaves find their way there from certain countries in Europe. Without more definite proof than I now possess I do not feel justified in making any statement as to exactly whence and how.

It will horrify many people, doubtless, to know that slavery is so far from being universally abolished that a conference was held by the League of Nations no later than last year to discuss ways and means; and that the representative of a certain European nation openly questioned the advisability of a drastic abolition of slavery in his country's colonies.

I state this last, not as a stricture on that country, but as information. As a matter of fact, I agree with that country's representative. We, who have been brought up on "Uncle Tom's Cabin" have absorbed an abhorrence of slavery, the mere word, without knowing any more about the subject than was set forth in that very one-sided and hysterical book. I state without hesitation—and I am sure that many *Adventure* writers will bear me out—that many free people whom I have known are infinitely worse off than many slaves whom I have known. As a concrete case, the Aymara and Quechua peons of the Peruvian and Bolivian highlands are worse off in every way than the slaves of, let us say, Abyssinia.

For that matter, in Abyssinia the serf of the soil is worse off than the slave. There are some two million slaves in Abyssinia, *well fed* and *contented*. Let some one jeer at that impossible thought. Yet there is proof. The law of Abyssinia says that any slave who feels that he is not well treated by his master may bring charges against him before the tribunal established for that purpose; and if he can prove any act of cruelty, so trivial even as insufficient clothing —and slave testimony is accepted—he may go free. And the law adds naively: "if he wishes." It is illuminating and relevant that during the six years of the tribunal's functioning only seventeen slaves have demanded their freedom.

Yet one reads every now and then in missionary publications and in certain European propaganda sheets about the "frightful condition of slavery in Abyssinia". Blah, all of it. I know an Abyssinian noble who was "enlightened". He called all his slaves together, about a hundred of them, and made them an uplifting speech about the personal liberty of the individual and set the whole bunch free. Did they whoop around and have a parade and wave a flag and get drunk? Not they. They kept right on squatting there and refused to go.

"No," said they. "If we go away who will feed us and who will clothe us? We shall have to work."

They knew all about work because they had seen free citizens earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. Themselves, a hundred of them to divide up the duties of a one family household, they knew when they were in soft. That enlightened ex-slave-owner has to maintain an expensive sheep and corn farm in order to feed his hundred pensioners.

What is he to do? If he were to turn them out into the street what would become of them? Work? Neither by training nor inclination could they compete with free men born to the privilege of work. They would become paupers and, many of them, in desperation would turn to crime.

SLAVERY, like democracy, is not nearly so bad as it has been painted. Does it surprise anybody to read that people still exist in Europe who are convinced that democracy is a curse and a menace to the state? I propound the thesis that the slave mind is no more ready for sudden freedom than the imperially governed mind is ready for democracy. Neither knows what to do with it when he has it. It is his son or his son's son who is first ready to utilize personal liberty in a safe and sane manner.

Therefore, zealous religionists and screaming propagandists notwithstanding, I remain a strong supporter of that European representative at the League conference and of the King of Abyssinia who have decided that slavery can be sensibly abolished only by framing laws which assure its dying out with the existing generation and so letting the country and the people adjust themselves gradually to the new order of things.

Which, again, is a very different matter from the "slave trade" as conducted by Arab and half-breed raiders. Slave holding may be—in Abyssinia is—a benevolent domestic institution. The business of slave trapping and trading is almost as inhuman as the business of fur trapping and trading.

—GORDON MACCREAGH

ASK ADVENTURE

For free information
and services you
can't get elsewhere

Newfoundland

A NORTHERN country that no longer offers great possibilities to the trapper.

Request:—"I would like to receive some real information on Newfoundland. I am a Canadian, 47 years old, independent means, a trapper and prospector. Would like to go and live in your country if suitable. My scheme is this: Buy or build a house in a town or village, situated on a river which extends far enough into the bush to travel by water (canal or outboard) to the hunting grounds. This is what I do here, in Amor. Could you suggest a location?

1. Is your climate about the same as that of northern Quebec?
2. Kinds of game, fish, fur bearers.
3. Any wolves and any bounty on them?
4. Is all the island trapped to death?
5. Cost of living. I do my own cooking.
6. Cost of a small shack; cost of lumber.
7. Wages of a good carpenter, of a common laborer, of a hired girl.
8. Any French-Canadians there?
9. Any Indians?
10. Is the bush full of black flies and mosquitoes from the end of May till the middle of August?"

—D. DE PREESE, Amor, Quebec.

Reply, by Mr. C. T. James:—I would not recommend any one location. If you are intent on coming into Newfoundland to reside transiently or permanently, why not make a prospective trip and determine for yourself just where to settle down? There are several places that will fill your bill.

1. Somewhat similar.

2. Salmon, trout, partridge, rabbit, hare, beaver (indefinite close season on these and trapping prohibited). Otter, fox, marten, mink, muskrat.

3. No.

4. Pretty much so.

5. Haven't any idea, as don't know on what scale you live.

6. Cost may vary, according to distance from sawmills, lumbering centers and railway.

7. Not less than $4 per day of eight hours. Contracts made by agreement. No idea of domestics' rate of wage for living in the wilds.

8. Very few, and these work in the paper mills at Corner Brook and Grand Falls.

9. Several Indian settlements at bottoms of Bays on South Coast.

10. Flies and mosquitoes have open season from June until August.

General:—Close season on caribou extended from 1928. No shooting licenses issued.

No open season for moose, and penalty for killing is severe. Fresh water rod fishing licenses for season cost $26.

Non-residents have to buy a trapper's license at a cost of $500.

Game shooting license $50.

Black Watch

A BRIEF history of one of the most famous regiments in the world.

Request:—"I would like to find out from you if possible about the Royal Scotch Highlanders, especially the outfit named the "Black Watch"—what their pay is, how long they serve, their uniform, and if they have to be British subjects.

If you can forward this information I would appreciate it very much.

—LESLIE H. L. HOLLIER, San Diego, Cal.

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—The Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) regiment of the British army is one of the many regiments of that service with an exceedingly interesting history. In 1729 a number of independent military companies were formed in Scotland to maintain the peace in the Highlands. These were formed into a regiment in 1740, originally known as the 43rd Regiment of Foot, the number being subsequently changed to 42nd. The regiment wears the typical Highland uniform and its name of "The Black Watch" is derived from the color of its tartan.

The regiment got its baptism of fire at the battle of Fontenoy in 1745 when a French writer declared that "the Highland furies rushed in upon us with more violence than ever did sea driven by tempest". The Black Watch next fought against the French in America and also served here in the Revolution. It was in Egypt in 1800, in the Peninsular campaign under Wellington and also at Waterloo. It also fought in the Crimea, in India, in the war against the Boers in South Africa, and in the World War, always with distinction. The regiment has two battalions and its recruiting district comprises the counties of Fife, Forfar and Perth in Scotland. Its depot is at Perth.

Ordinarily only British subjects are accepted for enlistment in the British army. The term of enlistment is twelve years and in the infantry this is divided into seven years with the colors and five years in the reserve. The pay of a private is two shillings ninepence per day with the addition of certain allowances for food, uniform, etc.

Rifle

LITTLE wonder that firing a nine-shooter involved as much danger for the attacker as for the attacked.

Request:—"Will you kindly let me know whether there was such a thing as a nine-chambered rifle?"

—VERNON QUINN, New York City.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—The nine shot rifle of this period was the Cochran, an unsuccessful attempt at a multi-shot arm, of about the same period as the Colt, but greatly inferior to that weapon. The device that held the charges was a turret, and naturally, about a fourth of the loaded chambers pointed toward the shooter; results may better be imagined than described, in case of a multi-firing of charges.

I believe few of the Cochran rifles were ever sold; I have an idea that the larger gun collections in your city will have specimens, however. Patented in 1837, I understand from Mr. Sawyer's book, so the use of a nine-shot rifle by Mr. Gregg is entirely possible.

Coin

THIS hard-time token seems to have been made for sarcastic purposes.

Request:—"About 30 years ago I found a copper coin in an old house in Maryland and wish to know if it has a value to collectors. On one side is a man's head, at top of coin. Underneath is the word *Experiments, My Currency, My Glory.* Around edge are the words *My Substitute for The U. S. Bank.* On reverse side is the drawing of a pig, extended as if running, with the words *My Third Heat* on the pig's body; above it *My Glory* and under in small letters, *Down with the Bank.* Around the edge the words *Perish Credit, Perish Commerce* and date 1834. I also have an Irish copper coin, dated 1782. It has a Harp, the date 1782 and the word *Hibernia* on one side. On reverse a man's profile with the words *Georgios III. Rex.* Have copper U. S. large 1 cent, dated 1846, 1852, 1853 all in excellent shape. Have a U. S. 5c. piece, can not see date, that has the figure 5 in center, with a wreath of 13 stars surrounding it, stars separated by rays between. On reverse is large shield. Please tell me if any of these coins have a market value and if so, where I can sell them."

—MRS. JOHN T. WINTERS, Osgood, Ind.

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—The coin of which you sent a rubbing, and on which is the word "Experiments", is known as a hard-time token. These were issued in the late thirties and early forties of the last century. They are still common, at the most would be worth ten or fifteen cents. Your Irish copper coin of 1782, has no value, the United States cents are worth from five to fifteen cents each, and the five-cents piece has no premium.

Ox-Whip

AN EXPERT manipulator can use this powerful African whip as a weapon, a noose, a noisemaker—or a knife.

Request:—"I am interested in obtaining a genuine ox-whip, such as the Boers, and other ox-team drivers are said to use in certain parts of Africa.

According to such writers as I have read on the subject, these whips are a long lashed affair, running around twenty or thirty feet, or longer, and are made of giraffe or rhinoceros hide. I would also like to secure a genuine "*Kiboko*" whip of *safari* fame.

Why? Well, I've kind of got a crazy notion of making a collection of whips from all corners of the world. I like whips; was even a stock whip manipulator in a Wild West show at one time, so if you can tell me where I might obtain the above, I would appreciate it greatly.

Understand, too, that I want new usable whips, if possible; I would have no use for the museum relic or souvenir type.

Can you give me the address of some African firm who could supply me?"

—EDWIN SOUTHERLAND, Tulsa, Okla.

Reply, by Capt. F. J. Franklin:—Your letter interests me greatly and I can fix you up. During part of the Boer War I was a transport officer and had charge of hundreds of ox-wagons. Each ox-wagon was something like a prairie schooner and was drawn by sixteen oxen, two abreast—driven by two natives, one along with the two leading oxen; and the other with his long whip. The pole, made of bamboo, is about sixteen to twenty-five feet long, and the lash is around twenty to thirty feet.

The lash is usually made out of giraffe, rhino, or other animal hide of the tough kind, and is very highly prized and taken care of by the owner. They are carefully oiled and greased after the day's trek is over. The *voertrekker,* or native with the leading oxen, carries no whip, but sometimes a fly whisp made out of a horse's tail which he uses to flick the flies off the oxen. The native with the ox-whip is very expert and can hit an ox at any spot he wants to from a distance of twenty to thirty-five feet. The crack of an ox-whip sounds like a heavy caliber revolver going off.

I have seen an expert Boer ox-whip manipulator take a large piece of flesh out of the buttocks of a native when using a whip on him, as they used frequently to do. An ox-whip is very heavy, with the weight at the lash end, and it takes a strong man to handle one. Sometimes the driver when tired sits on the wagon seat and works from there, and it is very interesting to see his skill in working the thirty-foot *voerslaght,* or lash, around the covered wagon, never mixing it up or getting it tangled in any way. An ox-whip driver can coil his whip around any small object thirty or thirty-five feet away.

I remember once when we were crossing the Transvaal a staff officer was on his horse on the river bank giving fool orders and greatly retarding my work in getting the heavy wagons across the river. I spoke to two white conductors, each an expert with the ox-whip. I asked them to act simultaneously and accidentally on purpose get the interfering and overbearing staff officer—one around the neck and one around the tail of his horse. It worked splendidly, and my interferer was unseated from his horse. I rode up and apologized profusely. He never "tumbled" to it, but he never interfered with my work again.

Now to get to the whips: There is a firm called Morun Bros., headquarters at Quthing, Bastuoland, South Africa, who will fix you up. I get all my curiosities from them. I would suggest you order a very good specimen ox-whip, but one that has been broken in. Order three *voerslaghts,* or thongs, extra, as these break in practise and whipcord does not work well. They will get you the *Kiboko* whip too, which however is not particularly standardized.

Get also a fly whisp made out of black-and-white horse's tail and wired; also get a *sjambok*—and you will have a complete outfit.

Corfu

THE CHANCES of raising fir and spruce on this temperate Grecian Isle.

Request:—"Having seen your name and address in *Adventure,* I have taken the liberty of writing to you for your expert advice on the following subject:

Is there any fir tree (not pine) that could be introduced into an island with a fairly warm climate like that of Corfu, Greece? I have often seen pictures of fir tree forests in California (whose latitude at San Francisco is about the same as that of Corfu) and perhaps some Californian species would be suitable.

Particulars of climate and soil of Corfu:

Max. temperature: 36° Centigrade (August), Min. temperature: 0° Centigrade (for a few days only in Jan. and Feb.). Rainfall: Abundant from beginning Oct. to end April. Dry rest of year. Altitude: Fairly hilly. Culminating point, 3000 feet. Soil: Mostly limestone, sandstone and clay.

If you could also let me know where I could obtain the seeds of the fir tree you would consider the most suitable or if you could even send me a small quantity, I shall be extremely grateful. I shall of course refund you for any expense you might incur or, if you would prefer, send you in exchange seeds or specimens of trees and plants native to Corfu."

—DR. THEODORE STEPHANIDES, Corfu, Greece.

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—It is assumed that you understand the difficulty in advising in instances of this kind, when local climatic conditions are not thoroughly understood, extent of and force of winds, evaporation, etc.

However, I judge that the Norway spruce (*Picea excelsa*) would do fairly well at the mid-elevations you cite, and even perhaps at the lower altitudes. It is a rapid grower, does well in most soils, particularly in a limestone-loam-clay combination, and is very resistant to bleak cold winter winds. In about this same class is the white spruce (*Picea alba*). These two are, of course, not fir such as you mentioned but are of the spruce variety. It appears to me as quite doubtful if any of our firs would do well with you, except perhaps at your maximum elevation, and there might be some question of that. I am assuming that when you stated fir, you meant any of our evergreen coniferous species.

The Douglas spruce is quite successfully grown in Austria and it occurs to me that you might obtain nursery stock from that source and speed up the operation over direct seeding, if all you wanted was for a small area or for decorative or landscape purposes. I am not personally in position to supply you with tree seed. Unfortunately I have mislaid my catalogue of one of our best commercial seed houses, but am sure if you address a letter as follows: Commercial Tree Seed Company, Dealer in tree seed, Atlanta, Georgia, U. S. A. that it will reach them.

It is embarrassing to have to admit that most of the large scale direct seeding plantations here in the United States have proved far from successful, whereas a fair degree of success can nearly always be obtained from planting young stock. This latter is entirely practical and should always be followed (1) where time is essential. (2) Where decorative effect is desired on not too large area. (3) Where during growing season the top soil is liable to excessive drying. Much seed that germinates successfully can not withstand drying out, but withers and dies.

If I knew just what you had in mind to do, I might be able to offer helpful advice. But from our experience over here I should say that if you are merely experimenting, then direct seeding is all right; but if you desire results, then in proportion to your plant book *plant* by all means, rather than seed.

Fencing

INSTRUCTION is always begun in foil—and the fighting weapons, saber and épée, are not taken up until later.

Request:—"I would appreciate learning where I could learn to fence, what my chances of becoming above the average in proficiency would be, considering normal athletic requirements, and what the approximate rates for tuition would be, for individual instruction.

I should also like to know what type or school of fencing (that is Italian, Spanish or French) you deem most advisable for a novice to begin with. Also which school of fencing you consider superior.

I understand there is or was a Damascus blade that was so supple it could be bent completely from point to hilt without snapping, such was the excellence of the metal. If possible to procure such a rapier, would it be worth while to do so and might any particular benefit be derived from the use of such a weapon?

I noticed a recent advertisement by an Austrian officer stating he would give fencing instruction, but I was rather hesitant about applying, as I didn't know his reputation and reasoned that his instruction might consist of mere government requirements as prescribed by the Austrian government in their training schools."

—CLIFFORD D. HUNT, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. John V. Grombach:—You can learn to fence by receiving instruction from a professional, either privately, at a club, or in a *salle-d'armes*.

The latter way is the best and most economical manner of getting started. I mention the Salle Vince listed in the telephone directory or the Salle of Mr. Louis Senac similarly listed. Rates vary, but are usually about two dollars a lesson, here in New York.

As to the "schools of fencing," a beginner learns fundamentals, without regard or concern for any of the so called schools. Instruction is begun in foil, which is the basic weapon. The so called fighting weapons, namely saber and *épée* are never taken up until later. Fencing depends on the perfect mastering of fundamentals common to all schools and all weapons.

Do not buy any equipment until you have conferred with your instructor on this subject.

Damascus blades are rarely if ever used for fencing, though the stunt you describe is perfectly practicable but of negligible value in actual fencing practise.

As for the ad you mention, I can only say that any fencing master, no matter what his nationality or background, is quite competent to instruct a beginner, so that I do not agree with your reasoning on that point.

I hope that you will have success in learning how to fence.

Wolf

WHY the bite of a wolf is often fatal.

Request:—"The Forest Ranger who has charge of the Highwood and other districts in this part of Montana, a man who has had a great deal to do with wolves, not only in his work as Ranger, but who has raised some from pups, put forth a very interesting statement and I am just trying to check up on the same, inasmuch as he could not explain the why of it.

He stated that in many instances he has run across the carcasses of beeves killed by wolves on which there would be only a broken place in the hide where the fangs of the wolf had gone in. His idea of the matter is that the heat of the chase or the desire to kill causes the wolf to secrete some sort of poison that is exceedingly virulent.

Can you tell me if this is the case and what are the causes of the same, and if so, just when and how the poison is secreted. This poison does not seem to be in evidence when wolves are playing."

—G. S. KRIEGER, Stanford, Mont.

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—I do not claim to be an authority on this matter but have had some experience with wolves and with their killing and biting of live stock. From my experience I do not believe that a wolf secretes any kind of poison which causes the death of stock when bitten by them. I know of instances where stock, being lacerated by the fangs of wolves, have died, which is generally the case. Also I have known of instance where such stock no less badly lacerated have recovered.

I am inclined to the belief that where merely the lacerating of the flesh has caused death it is owing to infection of the wound; either at the time because of rotten meat in the teeth of the wolf and passed on with the saliva or the actual contact with the teeth.

That seems to me to be the most reasonable supposition. Of course, infection could no doubt take place later in several of various ways. I have also known blood poisioning to occur from the severe bite of a grizzly bear. I lay both to the same cause.

Saddlehorse

ONE OF the reasons black horses have been called meaner than others is that in summer their coats absorb a little more heat, which makes them fretful.

Request:—"1. I want to buy an unbroken colt and break him myself. I want a good running horse and a jumper. What breed of horse is the best saddler?

2. I'd like to teach the colt to jump before he is broken; how would I go about it?

3. Black horses are not any more mean than others, are they?

4. Can one teach a horse not to allow any one else to mount or ride him. If so, how?

5. Do you point your toes in or outward while riding? The English teach the outward method.

6. Could you by any means tell me where I could buy a saddle, something of the make of the Western, but without a horn? Heavily padded, high in front and just as high in back exactly or nearly so as the Western, but without the horn?

7. What kind of bit is the best to use?

8. Do you know where I could get an unbroken cayuse, and about how much it would be?

9. I have heard from various sources that there are wild horses in the swamps of Virginia, along the coast. Do you know if this is true or any one that could verify the statement?

10. Do you know where I can get any reading material on training of horses."

—PEGGY HERBERT, Martinsburg, W. Va.

Reply, by Thomas H. Dameron:—1. It is impossible to obtain a good runner and jumper in the same horse. An Irish thorobred would come nearest to meeting those requirements. The American saddle bred horse is conceded by most authorities to be the best saddler. For my purposes I prefer a cross breed, standard bred—thorobred.

2. A horse should be jumped very little before he is five years old, as it is very probable that he will break down if put to hard jumping before his bones and muscles are mature. You can, and should teach him to jump low hurdles and obstacles. The easiest means of doing this is to use a long rope, that is, let the horse circle around you with a long rein.

3. No. However, in the summer they are generally more fretful than light colored animals because they absorb more heat.

4. Yes. Most trick buckers are trained that way. Every trainer has his own method. Jesse Berry Company, Pleasant Hill, Ohio, gives a complete course on training which would give you general ideas of how to proceed.

5. Neither. The toes should be parallel with the horse. The natural way is to point them slightly outward.

6. The horn of a saddle is simply a piece of iron nailed to the tree. You can have a saddle made on any Western tree with the horn left off. Or, you could obtain an old Army McClelland saddle, have it covered, padded, and skirts mounted. The latter would be, I believe, just what you want.

7. In training a horse you need from three to ten bits, from common snaffle to long bar high port. A Rugby Pelham is the best all around bit to use, but some horses will require a change to a more severe bit from time to time.

8. They can be had for the asking out here if you go after them, or from three to five dollars delivered to the corral. I would advise you to buy one close to your home, a well bred unbroken colt. Why waste months of time training an animal of no potential value.

9. Yes. Horses of very low value were turned

out to forage as a means of disposing of them, and they have become wild.

10. Refer to the answer to question 4. Also, write to the Superintendent of Public Documents, Washinton, D. C., for price list No. 38, which will be sent free. It will list some pamphlets that will interest you. If you have not already done so I would suggest that you make inquiry in your public library. You might find some books there that would help you.

Cruise

WHY GO to remote Fernandez when the much more attractive Robinson Crusoe island—Tobago—lies in a balmier clime?

Request:—"I would like to get some information on the West Indies including the Bahamas.

I have a twenty-seven foot sloop of heavy construction with which my buddy and myself were planning on a cruise from New York, terminating at the island Juan Fernandez.

We would like to get the points of interest, particularly general information on Crusoe's island. The climate, the topography, natives if any, also to which country it belongs."

—WM. STANLEY, Cleveland, Ohio.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The Island of Juan Fernandez lies off the coast of Chile, South America, and is not within my territory, but will state that it belongs to Chile.

Was your idea to go through the Panama Canal and on down the South American coast, and out to the Island of Juan Fernandez in search of treasure?

If you have been stirred to a trip by reading Robinson Crusoe, I will ask you to read it again carefully and see if he does not state that his ship was blown off its course and that after taking an observation he found himself in "Latitude eleven degrees north, beyond the coast of Guiana, toward the River Oronoque," and also he mentions trying to reach the "English Islands" but was wrecked on a desert island.

This location, as stated, and his reference to the muddy waters of the "Gulph of the Oronoque" and that he could make out the faint outlines of the "Island of Trinidad," would place the island he was wrecked upon exactly where Tobago Island is located; and furthermore the natives will promise to show you the cave in which Crusoe lived, and will tell all about "Friday", etc., and they make it so interesting that it makes you wonder why Crusoe ever left such a nice place.

If this is the real Crusoe (Juan Fernandez) island, then why chance such a trip down the coast of South America?

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE NEXT ISSUE OF *ADVENTURE*
APRIL 15TH

CONQUEST

Traitors and liars were the men of *Ahmed Zogwar's* tribe. While paying lip service to the French, they smuggled rifles to the rebels and secretly joined in numerous bloody raids. *Captain Langevin* knew well that they had murdered his predecessor in command of the blockhouse. That no foreigner was safe within their borders; and as for an officer of the Legion—

These were *Langevin's* thoughts as he rode into their camp—alone—and through their sullen ranks. There was an off-chance that his brave gesture might result in a brilliant coup for France. And if it failed—well, wasn't the Legion the graveyard of Lost Causes? . . .

Don't miss this gripping complete novel.

By J. D. NEWSOM

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A novelette of a young missionary doctor's adventures among the innermost mysteries of Tibet.

By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

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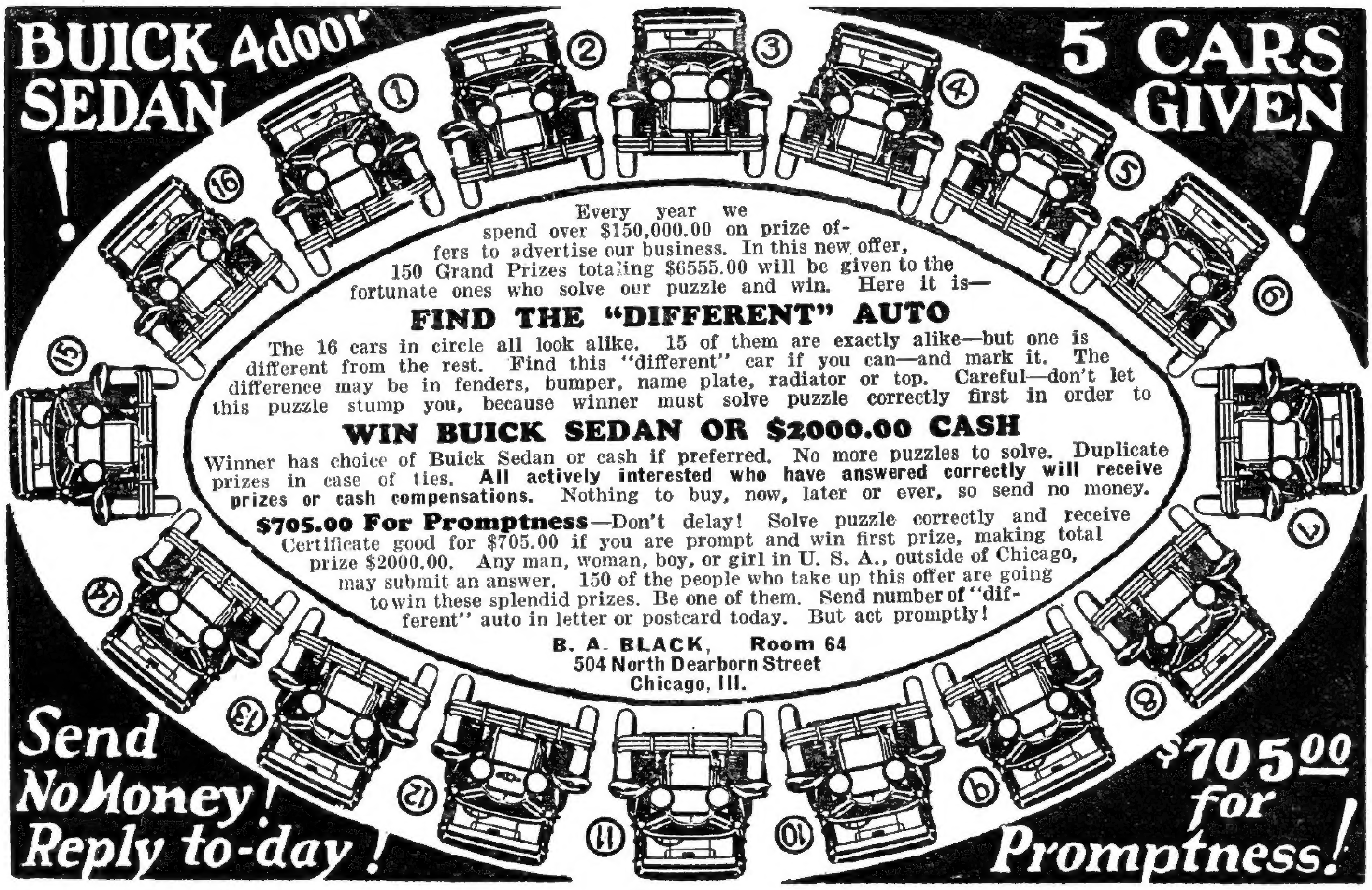

Every year we spend over $150,000.00 on prize offers to advertise our business. In this new offer, 150 Grand Prizes totaling $6555.00 will be given to the fortunate ones who solve our puzzle and win. Here it is—

FIND THE "DIFFERENT" AUTO

The 16 cars in circle all look alike. 15 of them are exactly alike—but one is different from the rest. Find this "different" car if you can—and mark it. The difference may be in fenders, bumper, name plate, radiator or top. Careful—don't let this puzzle stump you, because winner must solve puzzle correctly first in order to

WIN BUICK SEDAN OR $2000.00 CASH

Winner has choice of Buick Sedan or cash if preferred. No more puzzles to solve. Duplicate prizes in case of ties. **All actively interested who have answered correctly will receive prizes or cash compensations.** Nothing to buy, now, later or ever, so send no money.

$705.00 For Promptness—Don't delay! Solve puzzle correctly and receive Certificate good for $705.00 if you are prompt and win first prize, making total prize $2000.00. Any man, woman, boy, or girl in U. S. A., outside of Chicago, may submit an answer. 150 of the people who take up this offer are going to win these splendid prizes. Be one of them. Send number of "different" auto in letter or postcard today. But act promptly!

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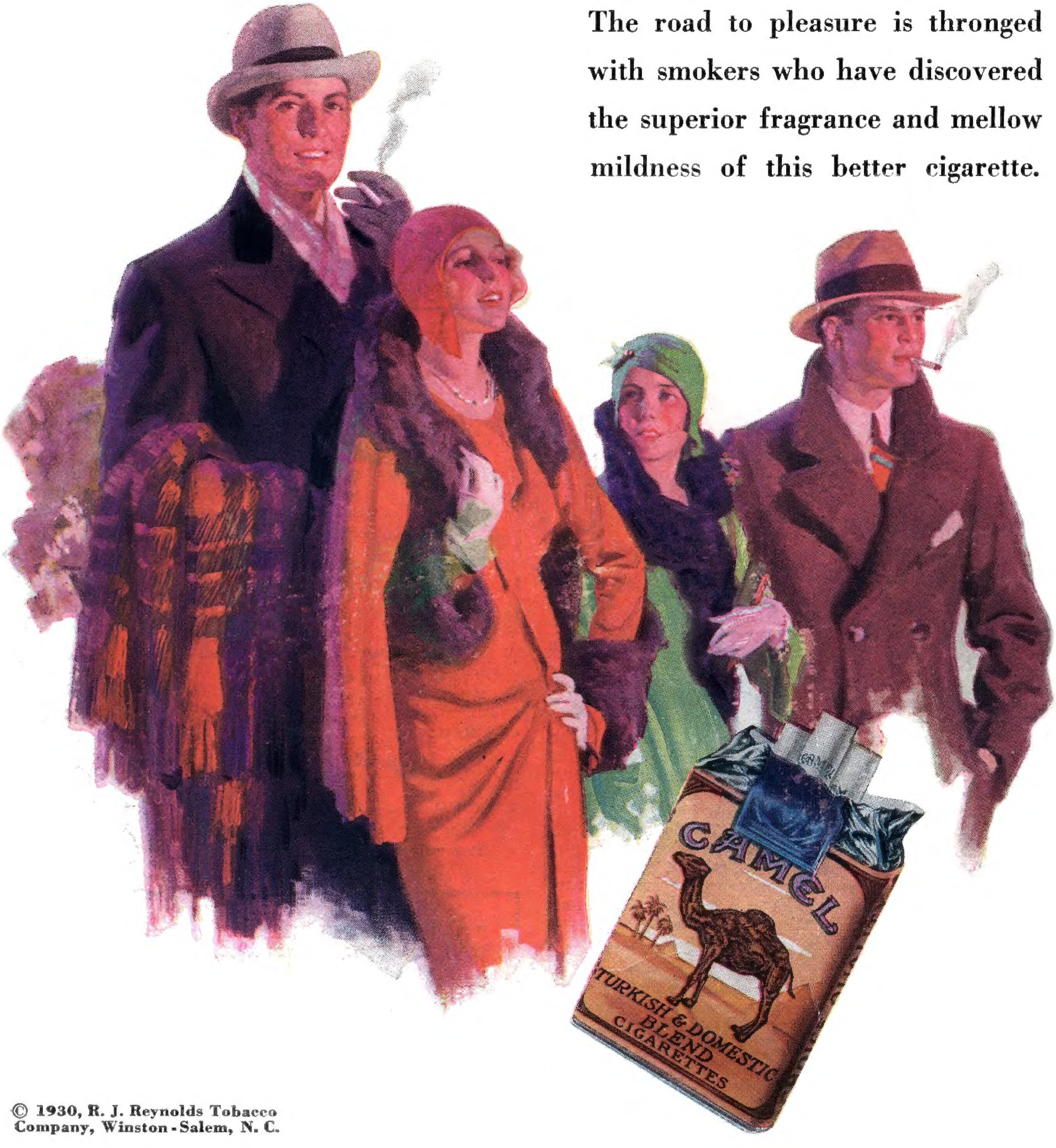
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